Dale C. Maley

Many Lives in One Lifetime

By:

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Dale C. Maley: Many Lives in One Lifetime
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Foreword

Several people have suggested over the years that I should write an autobiography. My usual response was that my life was not all that different from the lives of many other people who grew up in rural Illinois.

I was born in 1955 and grew up on a farm in Avoca Township near Fairbury, Illinois. Like many farm kids of my generation, I learned responsibility at an early age through chores, taking care of livestock, and helping with the daily work required to keep a farm operating. I attended Fairbury-Cropsey schools, graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in engineering, and spent my career working for Caterpillar. While working at Caterpillar, I got an MBA (Masters in Business Administration) degree from Illinois State University by taking three years of night and summer classes.

On the surface, that may not sound like a particularly unusual life.

As I entered retirement, however, I began to realize that I had been fortunate to witness and participate in a remarkable period of change. During my lifetime, agriculture evolved from small family farms to highly mechanized operations. Engineering moved from slide rules and drafting boards to computers and sophisticated modeling software. Communication progressed from party-line telephones and handwritten letters to the Internet, smart phones, and artificial intelligence.

Along the way, I had opportunities to work on interesting engineering projects, help start up a new Caterpillar manufacturing plant, participate in major patent litigation, write books on investing and local history, create websites, produce YouTube videos, and become involved with organizations dedicated to preserving local history.

Perhaps more importantly, I was blessed with wonderful parents, grandparents, relatives, teachers, friends, coworkers, and mentors who helped shape my life. The lessons they taught me about hard work, honesty, responsibility, curiosity, and service to others proved far more valuable than any technical knowledge I acquired.

This book is not intended to be a record of accomplishments. Rather, it is a collection of memories, stories, successes, failures, lessons learned, and observations gathered during seventy years of life. Some stories are humorous, some are sad, and some document a way of life that has largely disappeared.

I have spent much of my retirement preserving the history of others and the Fairbury area. Eventually, I realized that future generations of my own family might appreciate knowing something about the life experiences that shaped their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. That realization finally convinced me to write this book.

If these pages help family members better understand where they came from, preserve a few memories that otherwise would be lost, or encourage someone to live a life of curiosity and lifelong learning. The effort of writing this autobiography will have been worthwhile.

Dale C. Maley
2026

Acknowledgments

Many thanks go to my sisters Karen and Lisa for proofreading the drafts and helping me to remember key things that happened in our early years.

Many thanks go to my wife Connie for reminding me of many humorous stories.

Many thanks also go to my sister-in-law, Judith K. Wells, for proofreading the manuscript.

CHAPTER 1

Farm Boy (1955 to 1970)

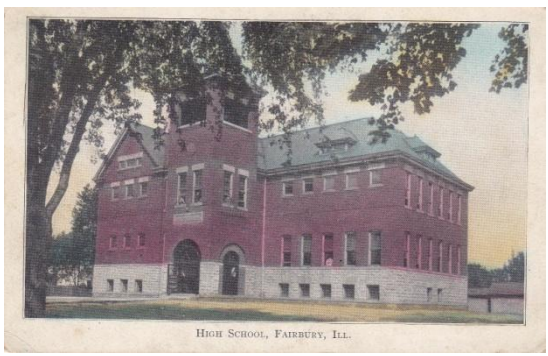
My father, Clarence Charles Maley (1934-2009), was born in Maysville, Kentucky, but grew up on a farm in Fairbury from about the age of five. He graduated from Fairbury-Cropsey High School and then enlisted in the U.S. Army. After being stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, he sent for my mother, Marjorie Carolyn Dameron, to travel to Fort Lewis and marry him.

I was born on December 1, 1955, at the Fort Lewis Army Hospital in Tacoma, Washington. When I was about one year old, my parents drove me in their automobile from Fort Lewis to a farm northwest of Fairbury.

Fairly quickly, our family grew to four children. Sister Karen Maley was born in 1956, followed by sister Lisa Maley, born in 1958. The last addition to our family was Brad Maley, born in 1960.

In 1960, I attended First Grade at Isaac Walton School in Fairbury. Mrs. Danforth was my teacher.

My 2nd-grade teacher was Mrs. Kilgus, and my 3rd-grade teacher was Mrs. Beer.



Isaac Walton Grade School at the northwest corner of Maple & 4th Streets

This school had a large bell in the front belfry, with a long hemp rope running to the ground for ringing the bell. If you were well-behaved, the teacher might let you ring the bell.

This old three-story brick schoolhouse built in 1895 and was later equipped with tubular fire escapes. It was great fun to have a fire drill where you got to slide down the long fire escape.

To the west was the scary Ramsey house. It was scary because it had a lot of trees and shrubs in the yard instead of grass. If your kickball went over the fence, we children were scared to get it, so we left it there.

We had jump ropes and round red kick balls available for recess. In kickball, a pitcher rolled the ball to home plate and the batter kicked the ball and then ran the bases similar to baseball. We also played "dodgeball" with the red kick balls. Someone got in the middle of the circle, and people in the circle tried to throw the ball at the person in the center.

Classmate Ben Meister and I would very carefully kick the red ball up against the side of the brick building, being very careful not to break one of the windows.

The building had the cafeteria in the basement and a library on the 2nd floor. We were never allowed to go to the 3rd floor, but it had a small gym there.

In 3rd grade, we often had reading contests where you might get a blue ribbon for reading 50 or 100 books.

One time on a warm day in April, my classmate and I decided to tie up one of our girl classmates to a tree in the schoolyard using our jump ropes. About the time we got her tied up, the school bell rang to end recess. My classmate and I forgot about the tied-up girl and went inside to our classroom. After we got back in class, the teacher heard someone yelling “Help” outside because the windows were open. The teacher had to go out and rescue the girl we left tied to the tree. We likely got into trouble with the teacher on that escapade!

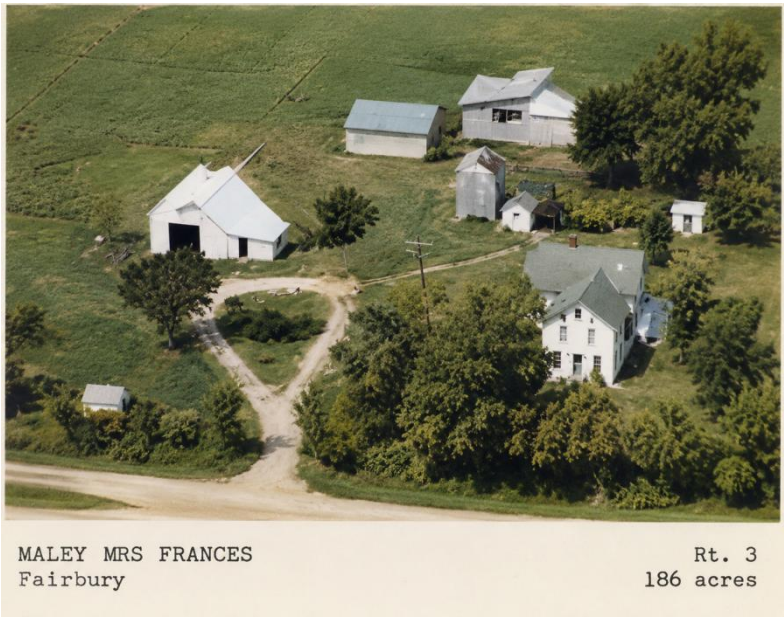
5th Generation to Live in our Farmhouse

My paternal grandfather died in 1952, before I was born. His widow, Frances Ann Bodley – Maley (1895-1968), lived in an apartment in Pontiac, but she kept a large garden at our farmhouse. She would often visit us when she came to our house to tend to her garden. She would often tell us stories when she visited.

One of her stories was that we were the 5th generation to live in our farmhouse. She told us that originally it was just a log cabin, which was later replaced by the wood-frame 2-story farmhouse we lived in.

She was born in 1895, and she would have been 10 years old when the frame house for the Bodley family was built in 1905.

1955 Aerial Photo of the Farm



1955 Aerial Photo of the Farm. This photo is very poor quality, so I used ChatGPT to enhance it. Some of the building rooflines are not correct, but the number of buildings is correct.

Typical Activities on the Farm

In the early 1960s, there was no television, no Internet, and no cell phones. We shared a party line with our neighbors. As children, we had to create or find our own entertainment.

From a very early age, we children were responsible for completing our daily chores. These chores typically involved feeding the hogs, chickens, or cows. We also had to gather eggs every day. We did get one day off per year from doing our daily chores. On your birthday, Dad would do the chores for you.

We often played baseball or kickball in the yard. Our second base was a tree my dad said was a Tree of Heaven. There was no sliding into 2nd base on our baseball diamond.

Years later, this tree died, and I saved some of the wood to make clocks for my siblings and me. The Tree of Heaven wood actually finished very nicely. My clock and some of my siblings' clocks are still working more than four decades after I made them.

The Lodemia Grain Elevator was about ½ mile straight north of us. We would often go with our dad to the elevator, and he might buy us a candy bar or give us change to get peanuts out of the machine. The elevator also had ice-cold bottles of Coca-Cola. These cold drinks really tasted good on a hot summer day!

When we got old enough, we would ride our bicycles down to the elevator. We would visit with the manager and buy some candy or pop.

Lodemia Grain Elevator Circa 1960

Stolen Cigars

In addition to bottles of cold pop, the elevator also sold candy bars, cigarettes, and cigars. We had a couple of different elevator managers, but I believe Keith Coleman (1930-2020) was the manager when the cigar problem arose.

One day, Keith did an inventory, and a whole box of cigars was missing! He remembered that only one neighborhood boy had been at the elevator that day. We often played baseball with this boy.

Keith called the boy's father and explained the problem. The father confronted his son, who then admitted he had stolen the entire box of cigars from the elevator. The father then told the son to bring the box outside by the corn crib.

The father told his son, "So if you want to smoke cigars, by golly, you are going to do it right now." The father lit up the first cigar for his son to smoke. The father noticed the son was not really inhaling the cigar smoke into his lungs. The father made his son deeply inhale each time he puffed on the cigar. Before the son had finished the first cigar, he turned green and started to throw up. The father made the son return the rest of the box to Keith at the elevator, and he made him pay Keith for the smoked cigar. The son never smoked after that day!

Go-Kart

My dad got us a go-kart to drive around our driveway. We spent hours and hours riding that go-kart.

My mother even drove the go-kart occasionally, as shown in this photograph!

This photo was taken in July of 1964, and from left to right are Brad, Karen, Lisa, and Dale.

Old Railroad

We had railroad tracks running through one of our fields about a ¼ mile from the road. The tracks were in such bad shape that the train could never safely travel at more than about 15 miles per hour.

We would take pennies with us and then put them on the track. The train would flatten them out for us. Wild strawberries liked to grow along the tracks. They had much smaller berries than regular strawberries, but they were much sweeter. It took a lot of effort to pick and eat a lot of those small wild strawberries!

Drainage Ditch

We also had a drainage ditch that started about a ¼ mile northwest of our house. Some large buried field tiles drained into an open ditch under a bridge. In the summertime, we would walk or ride our bikes to this ditch. Sometimes we would wade in the water on a hot summer day. The water always seemed ice cold because it was draining from the buried clay tile. We would also check out the little fish and frogs that lived in the water.

Run Around the House

Four kids often run out of things to do inside a house. If we were becoming a nuisance to our parents, my dad would say, “Go outside and run around the house three times to get the stink blown off you.”

Playing in the Barn and Corn Crib

In the barn, we would build "forts" out of bales of hay. We would also jump from the stacked rectangular bales, hopefully landing on some loose hay on the floor. We would also explore the old corn crib. It actually had some compartments on the 2nd story that were used to store oats or wheat.

Catastrophe Avoided At Isaac Walton School

In April of 1963, I was in the 3rd grade at Isaac Walton. Our classroom was on the west side of the building on the 2nd story.

Fairbury often experiences high winds in April or May each year that damage trees and buildings. In 1963, the high winds came through town and blew the exterior brick wall into the classroom. Fortunately, this happened in the evening when school was not in session. Bricks fell onto my desk in the classroom!

Since there were only a few weeks left in that school session, there was no time to repair the wall before school was out for the summer. School officials decided to send my 3rd-grade class temporarily to the Lincoln Junior High School building. The Junior High students thought we were very cute, and they helped us get around the school.

Westview

I attended grades 4 through 6 at the relatively new Westview grade school located on South First Street. I joined the band and learned to play the alto saxophone.

Music Enters Our Lives

I can remember my sister Karen and me going to Mrs. Goold's house on Saturday mornings to take piano lessons. She lived in an old farmhouse which was just a mile or two across the section from us. I can remember watching the first Lava Lamp I had ever seen at Mrs. Goold's house while Karen was getting her piano lesson. My dad bought an old, used upright piano and moved it to the dining room in our farmhouse.

Grandpa Harold Dameron (1897- 1964)

Grandpa Dameron died in 1964 when I was 9 years old. I only got to spend a few years around him between the ages of 5 and 9. He worked many years and retired from the TP&W Railroad.

We used to walk from his house at the southeast corner of 4th and Chestnut Street to the fairgrounds. There was a little league baseball diamond in the southeast portion of the fairgrounds. He and I used to watch Little League baseball games at the fairgrounds.

Grandpa Dameron liked to eat lunch at one of the taverns on Main Street. If I were spending the day with him, he would take me to lunch at one of these taverns. The tavern had colorful photos of scantily clad young ladies posted above the bar. I specifically remember the pretty girl in a wooden barrel.

Harold Dameron and Dale Maley in December 1963

At that time, my Grandma Beulah Dameron was still teaching school at the Edison Grade School, just one block north of her house. When she got home from school, her first question was, "Where did Grandpa take you for lunch? He better not have taken you to that tavern for lunch?"

If I answered yes, Grandma would verbally chew out Grandpa for taking a young boy to that darn tavern. If I said no, Grandma usually figured out that yes, he had taken me to the tavern!

Grandpa Dameron and His Yardsticks

He was raised in the era of "Spare the rod and spoil the child." If we misbehaved while at his house, he would grab one of his yardsticks, and we would get smacked on our bottoms. Yes, I got the yardstick treatment and likely deserved it.

Don’t Cross the Hard Road

Roads in the Fairbury area were initially dirt. When automobiles began to appear, some of the roads were graveled. Excitement grew in the 1920s when main highways were covered with concrete. These concrete roads were often called “Hard Roads.” Route 24 in Fairbury was usually called the Hard Road in the 1960s.

Once in a while, some of us kids got to spend several days with Grandma and Grandpa Dameron in town. Our parents loaded up our bicycles and took them with us, so we had an easy way to get around Fairbury.

But our parents gave us specific directions for using our bicycles: "Do not cross the Hard Road." This meant we could not cross Route 24 because it was too busy with traffic. Our travels were restricted to the south half of Fairbury.

In the 1960s, there were three grocery stores in Fairbury. The IGA store and Dave’s Supermarket were both north of Route 24. The only grocery store south of Route 24 was Simmie's. Our grandparents would give us some change, and then we would bicycle to Simmie’s and buy some frozen push-ups to cool off in the hot summer.

My sister Lisa remembers that we may have violated the “don’t cross the Hard Road” on at least one occasion when we went to visit our great aunt and uncle, Frank and Avis Masterson. They lived one block north of what is now the Dairy Queen.

Death of First Grandparent

Grandpa Harold Dameron died in 1964. We went to the funeral home, and we viewed his dead body. This was the first time I had been directly exposed to the death of another human being. He was buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery, just east of the Mausoleum.

Heartbroken with the Measles

My dad decided to build a new chicken house to hold 500 chickens. He did all the work himself. I can remember helping him make trusses for the roof. I got to glue the plywood pieces at the joints. Little did I know back then that I would be building 20 of my own trusses in 2023 for the Fairbury Echoes Museum's new awning!

It was time to install the tarpaper-style roofing on the new chicken house, and I was looking forward to helping my dad with this job. But tragedy hit, and I got the measles for a few days. I was heartbroken that I could not help. If I remember correctly, Dad waited a few days until I was feeling better, and I did get to help install the tarpaper!

The Ziller Family

They were our neighbors and lived about one mile east of us. They had three kids about the same age as our family. In the summer, we would often go fishing or swimming in one of their gravel pits just south of Wayne Ziller Senior's (1909-1998) house.

We would also ride our bikes down to their house and play baseball on hot summer days. Mrs. Ziller would often bake us some cookies and serve us ice-cold lemonade when we got too hot and needed to come inside for a break. They had a color TV, and we often watched Cubs baseball games while we ate our cookies and drank our cold lemonade.

In the winter, we would play in their barn. They had a huge barn full of hay bales. So we would play hide-and-seek and build forts out of the hay bales.

I Will Never Work There When I Grow Up

In the 1960s, my Grandma Frances Maley was the only County Nurse for all of Livingston County. She spent a lot of time driving around the county to provide services to Livingston County residents.

Sometimes she would take us on a car trip where we could tell her where to turn. On one of these trips, we happened to come down 4-H Park Road in Pontiac in the late afternoon. When we got to the Motorola Plant, there was a huge traffic jam of Motorola employees at shift change.

I told my Grandma Maley that when I grow up, I will never work at a place like that with too many traffic jams. Little did I know that I would end up working for 37 years at the Caterpillar Plant, which replaced the Motorola Plant around 1978!

Can You See the Maley Farm Cottonwood Tree?

My Grandma Maley had her office in the 2nd story of the old Courthouse in Pontiac. If you were well-behaved, she might give you a few sugar cubes that she kept stashed in a cabinet in her office.

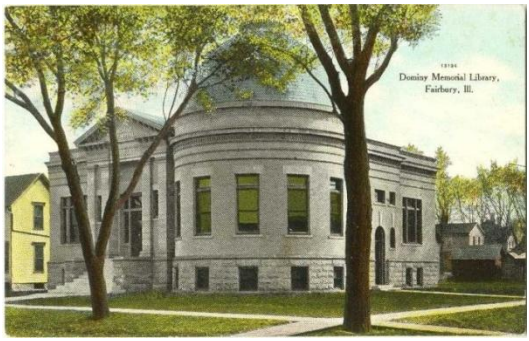
My Grandma Maley was the Livingston County Nurse. Before the oral polio vaccine became routine in doctors' offices, she traveled to schools throughout the county. She would place a few drops of the Sabin polio vaccine on a sugar cube, and each student would eat the sugar cube. She kept the sugar cubes in a cabinet in her office.

Later, schoolchildren also received fluoride treatments using metal trays placed over their teeth. My sisters still remember the unpleasant taste of those treatments. These fluoride treatments were discontinued after all the public water systems were fluoridated.

One time, she let me go up to the tallest tower on the old courthouse. She pointed out the large cottonwood tree that was on our farm, about five miles southeast of the old courthouse.

The Dominy Librarian Stretched the Rules

If I was well-behaved, I got to go with Mom from the farm to Fairbury when she did her weekly grocery shopping. The Dominy Memorial Library is kitty-corner to Dave's Supermarket.



I got a library card issued to me. I wanted to read all the books in the library very quickly, so I got the idea to get an empty cardboard box from Dave's Supermarket, where they gave them away for free. I took the empty grocery store box to the library and filled it up with about 10 books I wanted to read.

When I went to check out the box of books, the Librarian said there was a rule that a person could only check out only one or two books at a time. I explained to her that I only got to come to town about once a week.

The Librarian said that if I promised to read all the books and return them in one week, she would stretch the rules and let me take the whole grocery box home with me!

I probably then read several hundred books from the library, including Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, and Davy Crockett.

Animals on the Farm

My dad would buy baby chickens and then raise them in an old shed on the southwest corner of the farm. We learned how to fill the glass jar waterers and flip them over so the water stayed in them until the chickens used them.

We also had about 10 cows, with a small pasture for them to graze. We had a small barn with an attached one-story building, with an open wall to the south. In the winter, the cows could get out of the weather and go into the barn. The hay was kept in the barn, so it was easy to feed the cows.

My dad later used the shed in the southwest corner of the farm, which had baby chickens, to raise about 40 pigs. The manure would run down the sloped concrete floor and onto the pasture behind the shed.

My dad then built two new buildings. Each building could hold up to 500 chickens. My siblings and I would feed them and gather their eggs every day. Invariably, we would get a couple of roosters when we bought the chickens, even though we only wanted hens to lay eggs. These roosters would sometimes attack my sisters while they were gathering eggs. I often had to save my sisters from the roosters.

Honegger's was contracted to build a confined chicken house about 150 feet long that held 7,000 chickens. It was on the north side of our farmstead. My dad and the four kids would gather these eggs every day. At the time, this was considered a very large chicken operation.

When all four kids were in college, my dad lost his free labor for taking care of the chickens. He undertook a massive project to convert the chicken house over to a confinement pig operation. He dug out a pit about 4 feet deep under the entire building, then poured concrete floors and walls. The concrete slats are set on concrete block piers.

My dad could raise pigs in this building with very little additional labor. Eventually, he stopped raising pigs and rented the building to

a neighbor. This building eventually burned down in a massive fire, and it no longer stands.

Brand New Ford Galaxie 500 in Wreck at Pontiac Dairy Queen parking lot

My dad bought a brand-new 4-door Galaxie 500 to haul two adults and four young children. On weekends when we went to Pontiac to visit our Grandma Maley, we would often stop at Wilson's or Dairy Queen for ice cream.

When the car was still almost brand new, we parked in the Dairy Queen parking lot to eat our ice cream. Someone accidentally backed into my dad's brand new Galaxie 500! That car was built pretty ruggedly, so the body damage was minor.

Got to Go Swimming in Pontiac's Unique Chautauqua Park Pool

Fairbury got its first swimming pool in 1958, so in the 1960s we usually went swimming there.

On a couple of occasions, we got to swim in Pontiac's very unique Chautauqua pool, built in 1925. The Chautauqua Park in Pontiac often floods when the Vermilion River is high. For this reason, this pool had a unique design: it was built above ground, so flooding did not affect it.

This Chautauqua Pool went out of service in 2003 and was demolished circa 2016.

Playing with Our Cousins in McDowell

My dad had a brother, John B. Maley (1936-2002). He was married and had four children, the same number of children as our family. He was a trucker and did most of his own mechanic work. He was almost always very dirty-looking because of the grease and dirt he got on his clothes while working on his trucks.

On weekends, our family often traveled to McDowell, and we got to play with our first cousins. They were about our age, so we had a great time playing games in their yard.

Erecting the Red and White Grain Bins

My dad bought 2 bins from neighbor Bill Frisby (1920-2009). These bins were designed for eared corn, not shelled corn.

I got to help my dad with one of the biggest concrete jobs on the farm. We formed a circular concrete pad about 24 inches high. I learned how to design and build concrete forms from plywood.

By the time my dad bought these used bins, he had replaced his corn picker with a combine that produced shelled corn. We had to install vertical sheets of tin on the inside of the wired bins so they would hold the smaller pieces of shelled corn.

It took two people to install the J-hooks that held the sheet metal pieces to the wire crib. One person had to be on the inside of the bin and one on the outside. I got to help my dad install the hundreds of J-bolts required to finish the two bins.

McDowell Elevator General Store

In addition to the elevator complex, there was a small building on the train tracks just north of the main elevator. It was kind of a general hardware store for farmers and carried hardware items typically used by them.

Farmers could also order lumber or shingles from this store. They would be delivered by train to McDowell, and the elevator manager would unload the materials.

In the 1960s, Gerald (Jerry) Campbell (1934-2017) was the elevator manager. My dad ordered lumber and hardware from this store to build his two new 500-bird chicken houses.

Many years later, in the early 1980s, I worked with Jerry Campbell at Caterpillar in Pontiac. We used to enjoy reminiscing about the McDowell grain elevator and general store.

Death of Grandma Frances Maley in 1968

She died in Pontiac at the age of 72. She was a very good grandmother to all eight of her grandkids, and we missed her after she was gone. She is buried with her husband in Pontiac's St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery.

Frances Maley, Florence Dameron, Beulah Dameron, Marjorie Maley, Harold Dameron, and Dale Dameron circa 1955.

Junior High

For 7th and 8th grades, I attended Lincoln Junior High on North 7th Street in Fairbury. I really enjoyed science as the best class in Junior High school.

There was no Internet in the 1968-69 era. One of my teachers gave me a catalog for a company that sold chemistry lab supplies to schools. I decided to create my own chemistry lab in the basement of our farmhouse. I ordered all the supplies I needed using mail order catalogs.

One of my favorite projects in the farmhouse basement lab was making hydrogen gas and then exploding it!

First, I would tear apart old D-size batteries and remove the main zinc pieces. I then put the zinc pieces in a beaker with hydrochloric acid. The acid would start to bubble with the zinc, producing hydrogen gas.

I routed the hydrogen gas through rubber tubing so that it exited into an upside-down Coke bottle filled with water in a pan. The hydrogen would slowly displace the water, eventually filling a glass Coke bottle with hydrogen.

I would carefully remove the Coke bottle from the pan of water and keep holding it with the mouth down. When I put a lighted match near the bottle opening, it made a small explosion without breaking the Coke bottle.

I won two Blue Ribbons for the best science projects in Junior High school. One was a model of a volcano that actually produced foam and lava. The other was a model of a nuclear power plant.

Just a few years later, I got to use the high school lab. Without the teacher's permission, I decided to set up a distillery to make some alcohol. My still was working fine until it blew up!!

Apparently, one of my ornery classmates decided to cap my exhaust line, which caused the pressure to increase and break my hot beaker. Fortunately, nobody was hurt.

Looking back, I realize those basement chemistry experiments taught me to ask 'What happens if…?' That curiosity stayed with me throughout my engineering career.

Public Parks

As kids, our parents would take us on weekend drives to visit Grandma Frances Maley in Pontiac. Often, we went to Chautauqua Park in Pontiac. It had a lot of playground equipment. We would also walk across the Swinging Bridges, which were small pedestrian cable bridges.

We occasionally went to play at Marsh Park on the west side of Fairbury. On the last day of school each year, the students would walk from Westview to Marsh Park, eat their sack lunches, and play on the playground equipment.

I went to Marsh Park a few times after school to play baseball or football with friends. One of our classmates lived across the street from the park. He would bring the key game items (football, baseball, and bats) since he lived just across Ash Street from the park.

The only bad news about this arrangement was that if the classmate who lived across the street got mad and quit playing with us. He would then take his key sports equipment items home with him, which effectively ended whatever game we were playing.

So, neither my three siblings nor I spent much time at Marsh Park, since we were farm kids and lived about five miles northwest of Fairbury. But about 45 years later, all four of us volunteered to save the old park in 2017.

Chicago Cubs in the 1969 Season

The Cubs had a very good season that summer. My brother and I, plus the two Ziller brothers, would play baseball outside until we got hot. Then we went inside and watched the Cubs on TV while enjoying cookies and cold lemonade from Mrs. Ida Ziller.

We had the names of the players memorized at all nine positions. It was great to watch Ernie Banks hit home runs.

Late that summer, I got to go to Boy Scout camp at Lake Bloomington for a week or two. When I left for Boy Scout Camp, the Cubs were leading their division. No TVs or radios were allowed at Boy Scout Camp, so I had no idea how the Cubs were doing or whether they would win their division pennant.

Near the end of my stay at Boy Scout Camp, some of the fathers drove down from Fairbury and went with us on a canoeing trip on Lake Bloomington. My dad was one of those fathers who came, and we had a great time on the canoe trip.

When I got home, the first thing I did was check on the Cubs. I found out that during those few days I was at Boy Scout Camp, they fell from 1st to 2nd place in their division and did not win the pennant. I was so disappointed with the Cubs that I did not watch a Cubs baseball game for decades after their 1969 fall.

Dutch Elm Disease

One of the biggest changes I remember in Fairbury during the 1960s was the loss of the large elm trees to Dutch elm disease. Streets that towering trees had once shaded suddenly looked bare after the dead elms were removed.

My Grandma Dameron lost most of the beautiful trees in her front yard in Fairbury. Our neighbors to the south, Clark and Clara Bentley, also lost about four beautiful trees in their yard. In most cases, the dead trees were sawed off about 12 inches from the ground. Since these were big trees, they left massive tree stumps in the yards.

Do Not Let the Little Men Get You!

Clark and Clara Bentley were an elderly couple who lived just a quarter mile south of us. Until he retired, Clark farmed. Clara worked at the Fairbury Hospital.

When I was 12 or 14, I would mow their yard for them. I started up our small riding mower on our farm, then drove it a quarter mile south to the Bentley farm. One day, I started mowing their yard and had made about three rounds. I had to mow around the massive elm tree stumps.

About that time, Clara came out of the house. Her hand was waving in the air, and she was shouting something at me. I could not hear her because of the mower noise.

I turned off the mower beside one of the big tree stumps. She told me very seriously, “Those little men are coming out of the tree stumps today. Make sure and watch out for them and do not let them get you.”

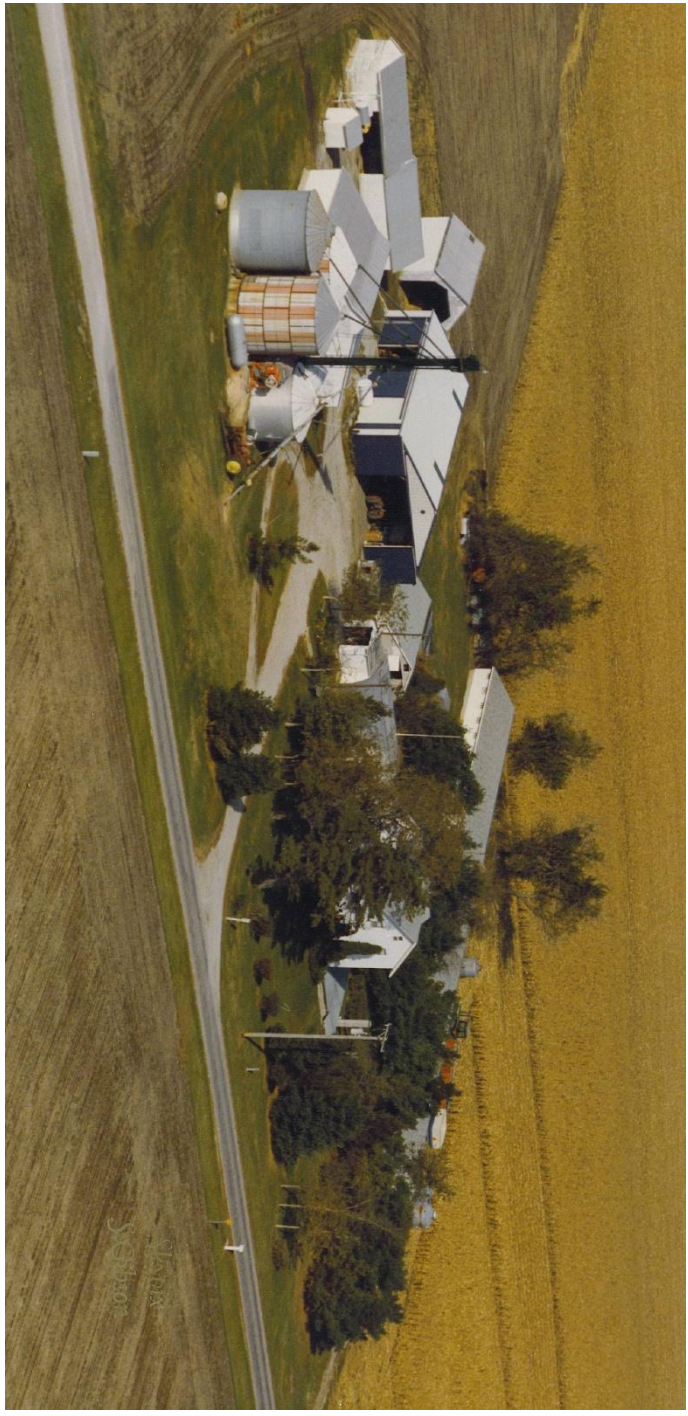
I was really surprised by her bizarre comment, but I said "Yes, ma'am," and I started the mower back up as she walked back to her house.

After making a few more rounds, Clara came out to see me again. On this second trip, she gave me the same warning as on her first visit. It was like a tape recorder in her brain was replaying the same warning! Word-for-word, she was repeating exactly what she told me the first time.

When I got home, I asked my mother about these two strange interactions with Clara. My mother shrugged and matter-of-factly

said, “She has hardening of the arteries.” In that era, that was the common saying describing someone who was starting to have dementia problems. Clara died a short time after that incident.

Maley Farm Circa 1985



CHAPTER 2

Fairbury-Cropsey High School (1970 to 1974)

The 1970-1971 school year was my freshman year in high school. My principal activities were football and band. During the summers, I would work on our farm and also on neighboring farms.

Shelling Corn

My siblings and I worked on our farm and helped on other nearby farms. We would "walk beans," which meant we walked through the bean fields and pulled all the weeds. We not only did this on our farm but also helped out on neighboring farms by walking their beans.

In the 1960s, many small farmers still had some livestock and therefore baled hay into rectangular bales to feed them. We baled hay on our farm and helped bale hay on our neighbor's farms.

Another big activity was "shelling corn." Ears of corn were first picked by hand in the field, and the ears were thrown into a wagon. By the 1960s, corn pickers were used to harvest corn and load it into a wagon. The eared corn was then lifted by an elevator up into the corn crib. The corn crib had exterior walls made of boards with about an inch of air gap between them. This air gap allowed airflow into the corn and naturally dried it.

So at the appropriate time, a farmer would hire someone with a corn sheller to come to his farm for the day. This sheller would take the ears of corn from the corn crib and convert them into shelled corn kernels that could be trucked to the local grain elevator for sale.

Neighboring farmers would come and help with the corn shelling. Kids who were old enough would also help out. Kids would often kick and pull on the ears of corn so they would flow down around the cross-boards in the crib to the bottom. At the bottom of the crib was a conveyor, and some of the corn had to be scooped by hand into it. Neighboring farmers brought their own corn scoop shovel to help with this task.

One year, Wayne Ziller Sr. brought his aluminum scoop shovel to "help" with the corn shelling. By then, he was relatively old and not really able to do much physical work. He likely came to the event to have something to do, tell stories, and give his neighboring farmers a hard time.

Wayne brought his corn scoop shovel, but he never used it that day. He just leaned it against the inside wall of the corn crib and used the shovel as a seat.

On corn-shelling day, we would find many mice and a few rats living in the corn crib and eating the corn. They would flee the corn crib when the corn was removed. Our dog ate so many mice on one occasion that he got full and just lay on the grass. Everyone was concerned that a mouse might run up your pant leg or down into your shirt.

On that day, I happened to be standing inside the corn crib with Wayne Ziller Sr. sitting on his scoop shovel. We were in the center aisle area, which was a driveway through the building. Behind him, I saw my Dad was up to something in the part of the corn crib where the eared corn was being shelled. I watched as my Dad smiled and stripped a few kernels of corn from an ear. My Dad then took his fingers and pushed one corn kernel through the one-inch gap in the boards, then dropped that kernel onto Wayne.

Wayne felt the kernel, but he just shrugged it off. My Dad dropped another kernel, and Wayne got more agitated on his shovel because that impact could be a mouse.

When my Dad dropped the 3rd kernel, he carefully aimed it so it went down the back of Wayne Ziller Sr.'s shirt. This time, Wayne was convinced a mouse had run down the back of his shirt, so he jumped up off his shovel and used his hands to feel his shirt.

When Wayne turned around and saw my Dad smiling at him on the other side of the corn crib wall, he figured out my Dad was pulling a prank on him. If Wayne could have gotten to him, he would have hit my Dad with his shovel!

Maley Family Well-Known at Fairbury-Cropsey High School

Our family had four children. For about 6 years, Maley kids were involved in many activities at Fairbury-Cropsey High School.

Dale was involved with the band and football. Brother Brad also played football. Sisters Karen and Lisa were both high school cheerleaders. It was nice having my sisters lead the cheers for our side when I was playing on the field!

Broken Knee

I continued to play football my sophomore year. Some of the better sophomore players got to scrimmage with the varsity team. We had a preseason scrimmage where I was a defensive back, running full speed across the field to tackle a ball carrier.

I did not see a junior year player come and throw a block at my knees. According to the other players, our collision made quite a noise. Both of us were knocked out briefly. The junior player who threw the block got up and walked away from the collision. One

ironic part of this collision was that the other player had the same first name as me, Dale Bunting.

I couldn't stand up, and the coaches had to help me up. Some other players took me to the training room. The trainer told me to go home and take some aspirin.

Someone called my mother, and she came and took me home. My knee hurt all night, and I could not sleep. By morning, my knee had swollen to twice its normal size. My mother took me to the little clinic in Fairbury.

The nurse at the clinic had me carefully get up and onto the X-ray table. She then took an X-ray of my knee joint with it upright. The nurse said I had to rotate my knee so my leg lay flat on the X-ray table to get a different view of the joint. I was unable to move my injured knee. The nurse grabbed my knee and twisted it to the right position. I don't think I've ever felt that much pain in my life!

She finished the X-ray but told me to stay on the table until the results were developed. After a few minutes, she said the X-ray did not turn out, so we had to repeat the procedure!

After the X-rays at the clinic, they next sent my mother and me to one of the Bloomington hospitals. The doctor applied a plaster cast to my injured leg. I was then admitted to the Fairbury hospital for one week and then went to school on crutches for five more weeks until the cast was removed.

The only good news about this event was that several pretty girls in my high school class came to visit me at the hospital. They wheeled me around the hospital halls in a wheelchair.

That was the end of my sophomore year in football. I recovered and played football in my junior and senior years. Because of my injury, I was not able to get my driver's license at age 16. Most teenagers look forward to getting their driver's licenses, so I was disappointed at the time.

Today, if a collision like that occurred on the football field, both players would be immediately sent to the appropriate facility to get X-rays or an MRI. In my case, the trainer told me to go home and take some aspirin.

Detasseling Corn

When we got old enough, my siblings and I worked on the corn detasseling crew. We would meet at Old City Hall, and the company doing the detasseling would pick up all the kids who wanted to work that day. A truck transported us to the field being detasseled.

In that era, hybrid corn strains were developed by pollinating one variety of corn with another. All the tassels had to be removed to prevent those rows of corn from self-pollinating.

Over 90 percent of the time, we had to walk through the very wet, cold corn rows to pull the corn tassels. Maybe 10 percent of the time, we got lucky, and we got to ride on a detasseling machine. You sat in your seat and pulled off the tassels as the machine went down the corn rows.

First Car

The late 1960s were the "Muscle Car" era. Car manufacturers put large, powerful engines in lighter-weight cars.

After reviewing all the late-1960s cars, I decided I wanted to buy a used 1969 Dodge Charger with a 440 cubic inch engine and a 6-pack carburetor system (three carburetors with 2 barrels each). I saved the money from doing odd jobs, and I finally got the $1,800 needed to purchase one of these cars.

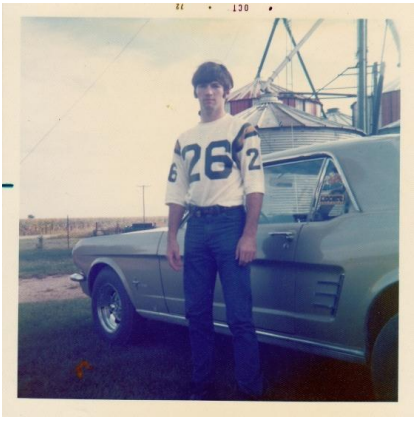
My Dad worked as a car mechanic at the Ford garage in Fairbury while in high school in the 1950s. Later, in the 1960s, he worked

there again as a mechanic during the winter months when there were no farming tasks to occupy his time.

About the time I was ready to buy my dream car, my Dad told me to go to the Ford garage where he was working that winter and pick out one of the repainted Mustangs they had. I told him I did not want a Mustang and wanted a 1969 Charger. He told me, “You don’t understand, either you get one of these Mustangs or you don’t get a car at all.”

I did not know much about Mustangs, so I looked them up. They came with either a 6-cylinder engine or a more powerful V-8 engine. I thought at the time, "Well, it might be an Okay car equipped with the V-8 289 cubic inch motor."

So I went to the Ford garage at the northeast corner of Route 24 and 2nd Street. There were about 4 repainted 1966 Mustangs in a row in the lot. I raised the hood on the first one and was disappointed to find it had a 6-cylinder engine instead of a V-8. I then raised the hoods on the next three Mustangs, and they all had the 200-cubic-inch 6-cylinder engines. Darn, none of them had the V-8 engine. I picked one out, and my Dad paid $850 for the used Mustang. He told me he would buy the car, but I had to pay all other expenses, including insurance and gas.



In retrospect, my Dad was probably very wise. Combining a young male driver with a powerful car usually led to bad things happening. Car insurance companies quickly realized this and raised premiums very high in the early 1970s. These high insurance premiums and increased emissions requirements led to the

demise of the Muscle Car era.

I did equip my 1966 Mustang with chrome mag wheels and big fat tires on the back. Of course, I also had to add a loud muffler as well!

Using the Mustang

In the winter, I took my siblings in the Mustang to go sledding close to Wayne Ziller Senior's house. We went sledding down the hills on the south side of the Vermilion River.

Sister Karen Maley went down the hill super fast on one trip. She finished going down the hill and shot out onto the Vermilion River. Fortunately, there was enough ice on the river that she did not fall into the cold water.

Avoca Township Hall

Our farm was in Avoca Township, northwest of Fairbury. The township had a meeting hall just northeast of the Lodemia grain elevator. It was a very neat building with a raised stage and a fully equipped kitchen. It also had a piano.

The people living within a couple of miles of Lodemia formed the ABC (Avoca Betterment Club) group. This group of neighbors would meet at each other's houses or at the township hall. They would often help a neighbor do a specific improvement project at their farmstead.

As a kid, it was always exciting to go to any event that was held at the township hall. The meeting minutes and some photographs still exist for events at the township hall. On December 21, 1963, the ABC club held its Christmas program at the township hall. According

Various neighborhood children performing at the township hall

to the meeting minutes, in addition to singing by several children, Dale Maley gave a “recitation” to the group.

> I was only 9 years old when I gave that recitation or speech. That was probably my first time speaking in public. Little did I know that was the beginning of a lifetime of giving presentations and speeches at Caterpillar and to various community groups!

Tom Smallwood

Tommy Smallwood (1946-1969) lived a couple of miles northeast of us. I helped shell corn for his parents on their farm. I really liked both of his parents.

Tommy was nine years older than me. I did not really know him, but all the neighborhood boys knew of him by reputation. As a teenager, he was always in trouble with the law.

He served in the Vietnam War. After his service was completed, he gave a slide presentation at the Avoca Township Hall. My Dad asked me if I wanted to go with him to the presentation, and I said yes.

What struck me at the meeting was that Tommy got into a very loud argument with his father about something. I was always raised to respect my father, and I would never get into a major argument in public with my father.

Just a short time after the Avoca Township Vietnam presentation, Tommy committed suicide by shooting himself. Tommy had issues before he went to Vietnam, and the war experience likely negatively impacted him. I felt sad for his parents when they lost their son.

The Band Dispute

During high school, I was about the only boy who tried to participate in both band and football. As I started my junior year in high school, I was trying to keep doing both band and football.

Mr. Bruce Hammitt, the band instructor, imposed rules on me that I found unfair and that would make it impossible to do both band and football. So, I quit the band.

Since I no longer attended band during one of the class periods, I was sent to Study Hall. I was randomly assigned to sit by this pretty blonde girl, Connie Wells. She was a year younger, or a sophomore.

I got to like this pretty girl, but I couldn't ask her out because she was already dating one of my classmates. By the Spring of 1973, her relationship with my classmate ended.

Since I had never taken a girl on a date, I was a little scared to do so. I decided to take Connie on a double date with Danny Ifft and his girlfriend. Danny Ifft and Jeff Kilgus were two of my best friends during high school.

For various reasons, our first two attempts at a double date did not work out. So the third time, I went ahead and took Connie on our first date to watch a movie in Pontiac.

So that band dispute with Mr. Hammitt led to Connie and me being married for almost 50 years with two children and eight grandchildren!

Mortarizing Tom Schahrer

Tom Schahrer was a year or two younger than me. During lunch hour, he liked to make a smart remark to one of my friends or me, then he would run into the band room, where he was safe because Mr. Hammitt ate his lunch in the band room.

At this time, a major modification was underway to connect Lincoln Junior High to the old High School building. Masons were laying blocks, and their mortar was brought to them in buckets.

My friends and I finally decided to outsmart Tom Schahrer. We devised a scheme where we stationed a person at each of the two

doors leading to the band room. When he made his smart comment and then ran to the band room for safety, one of us was waiting to "capture him." We then took some fresh mortar from a bucket and gave him a mortar shampoo on his head!

We probably got into some minor trouble with school officials, but this put an end to Tom making smart comments to us during the lunch hour.

Senior Year in High School

Looking back, my senior year at Fairbury-Cropsey High School was a lot of fun. In football, we had two miserable losing seasons during my sophomore and junior years. That football coach moved on, and we got a new coach, John Ayres, whom everyone liked.

Our football team was very good in my senior year, and we tied for winning our conference title. I played both ways as a running back and a defensive back.

Time to Start Thinking About College

I had Roberta Herzog (1919-1991) for freshman Algebra. Then I had the same math teacher, Roy Melvin (1912-1982), for the next three years of high school math. He taught us Trigonometry, but did not teach us any Calculus.

I liked math and Mr. Melvin. He told me I was better at math than he was and that I should consider going to the University of Illinois.

College Roommate Plan

One of my classmates was Rick Rothenberger. He played football with me, and we were friends. Rick scored very high on national tests, such as the ACT. Rick also decided to attend the University of Illinois, so we became roommates in college.

I filed my application to the University of Illinois and stated that I wanted to be Rick Rothenberger's roommate.

Drugs were still a problem when I was in high school. Rick Rothenberger liked to drink beer and use drugs. He lived in a house near the southwest intersection of Second and Hickory streets, not far from the High School.

One night, Rick's father heard him come home around midnight and go to his upstairs bedroom. A short time later, his father heard a very weird noise coming from Rick's upstairs bedroom. His father went upstairs to investigate and found Rick unconscious and having a seizure. He was rushed to the Fairbury Hospital and was in a coma for about 24 hours before he regained consciousness.

After that incident, Rick was never the same. He started exhibiting very strange behaviors, like bullying young boys in high school. I kept reminding him about filing the University of Illinois application on time so we could become roommates, and he always assured me he would take care of it. I believed that Rick had suffered a massive drug overdose, and it permanently affected his brain.

Rick did not get his application submitted in time, so I was randomly assigned to live in Nobel Hall, an all-male dorm at the University of Illinois. Rick got admitted to the university but had to live in an off-campus house. He attended the first few weeks of class and then dropped out of college.

Many years later, Rick was convicted of abusing the children he was supposed to be a counselor for in Bloomington. He received a 60-year sentence and died in prison of cancer in Pontiac in 2024.

Looking back, it was probably a blessing that Rick and I did not become roommates in college. Rick was one of many examples of a wasted life because of drug use.

Almost Not Admitted to the University of Illinois

I did not like the guidance counselor at Fairbury-Cropsey High School when I was a senior. I decided to fill out the University of Illinois application myself rather than have the guidance counselor's office complete it.

I filled out the application, but I did not know the five-digit code for Fairbury-Cropsey High School. I could ask Agnes Rapp, the lady who worked in the school office, for the code so I could submit my application. The guidance counselor happened to walk up just as I asked Agnes the code question. The guidance counselor grabbed my application from my hands and said, "Don't worry about it, we will complete the application and mail it in."

I did not really apply myself in my high school classes, except for math and science. As a result, I was ranked only 29th out of 104 students. I did relatively well on the ACT.

A few weeks later, I got a letter from the University of Illinois. The good news was that I was admitted as a freshman for the upcoming school year. The bad news was that, because I was ranked last out of a class of 29, I would probably flunk out, as I could not even get C grades my first year!!

The guidance counselor's office messed up my class ranking, saying I was ranked last out of 29 when I was really ranked 29th out of 104!

I filed a correction with the University of Illinois, and my next letter said I would probably do okay grade-wise my freshman year.

Breaking the Records in High School Physics Class

When I started taking my senior year physics class, the teacher said his students could earn extra points by doing extra assignments. The teacher said the all-time record for extra points was held by Richard Moscicki (who went on to become a

medical doctor) and John Reis (who went on to become a nuclear power plant engineer).

I decided I wanted to break the extra-point record and beat both of these older boys. I did the extra work and became the all-time leader in physics class extra points.

Unfortunately, all that extra credit work did not help me in the physics classes at the University of Illinois. I struggled to get a C in freshman physics. I found out many suburban Chicago students used the same textbook as the University of Illinois freshman class when they were seniors in high school!

2nd Recommendation for Attending the University of Illinois

Teacher Roy Melvin was the first person to recommend that I attend the University of Illinois. The second person was Bob Maurer (1915-2011). He was a high school agriculture teacher who later worked at the Fairbury Bank.

I applied and received a $1,000 student loan. To get this loan, I had to take the paperwork to Mr. Maurer at the bank. When I met with him, he said he was going to go to the U of I until he had a bad experience. He borrowed his father's car to drive from Fairbury to Champaign to register for college. When he arrived, he got a flat tire and was parked in one of the massive parking lots south of campus. As he changed the tire, he looked around at the sea of cars in those huge parking lots. Being from the small town of Fairbury, he decided the heck with the large U of I, and he went to Illinois State University instead. He encouraged me to attend the U of I.

CLEP Testing at the University of Illinois

Since I was paying my college expenses, I was very sensitive to college costs. Somehow, I learned that you could take special tests at the University of Illinois and earn college credit if you scored high enough.

Rick Rothenberger and I drove from Fairbury down to Champaign in my Mustang. We took many different tests on a Saturday at the University of Illinois.

Unfortunately, I only qualified for 3 hours of college credit in Biology. I had “Doc” Kilgus as a teacher in high school Biology class, and apparently he taught me very well!

Social Life in My Senior Year

Connie and I continued to "go steady" in high school. She worked at the Waltons department store in a special school program where you attended high school classes for half a day and then worked at a local business the rest of the day.

The two big social events in high school were the Homecoming Dance and the Prom. Connie and I attended both of those events.

I really wanted to finish college before getting married.

Lost the First 1966 Mustang

The summer before I was slated to start college, I crashed the Mustang about a mile from home one night. It was a case of "mixing alcohol with gasoline". Fortunately, I was not hurt.

I needed a car, so I quickly searched for a replacement car. I bought a 1965 Mustang from Gerry Brandt. It was red with a white vinyl colored top. I bought the wrecked 1966 Mustang back from the insurance company for $25 because I wanted to use some of the 1966 parts on the 1965 Mustang.

I had to do some bodywork on the 1965 Mustang to fix rust spots behind the wheels. My car looked like a "Christmas Tree" for a few months until I got it painted all green.

In retrospect, it is amazing that any girl would drive around Fairbury with me in this very weird-looking car!!

Since Connie did this, I should have known she “was a keeper.”

Building my 1st Hot Rod Engine

On the farm, I was naturally inquisitive about anything mechanical. I always wanted to tear the mechanism apart to see how it worked!

I was one of those kids who tore apart the lawn mower engine even though there was nothing wrong with it.

The 1965 Mustang had a 289 cubic-inch stock V-8 engine and a three-speed manual transmission. I had it painted the same green color as my first 1966 Mustang.

One of my best friends, Jeff Kilgus, had a 1967 Mustang. He accidentally blew up the engine which had been “souped up.” Jeff and I then stood under one of the shade trees on his dairy farm just south of Fairbury, and we negotiated the price of each engine part he sold me from his blown-up engine. Some of the items included headers, a Mallory dual-point ignition, a 780 Holly four-barrel carburetor, and an Edelbrock high-rise 4-barrel aluminum manifold. Jeff bought a used 302 cubic engine and put it in his Mustang to replace the blown motor.

I decided to pull my stock 289 cubic inch V-8 and store it. I planned to build a new motor using Jeff's high-performance engine parts and install it in my 1965 Mustang.

I bought a 289 cubic inch short block engine from a Champaign junkyard. From the same junkyard, I bought a pair of 351-cubic-inch Windsor heads.

I used to buy some Hot Rod magazines back then. I found an article about someone souping up a Ford 289 engine, including installing 350 cubic-inch heads to improve breathing and make more horsepower. The engine in the article was dyno-tested at somewhere between 300 and 350 horsepower.

The Hot Rod magazine article I was following as a rough guideline for souping up my engine stated that you needed to mill the heads or the intake manifold to make the 351 engine heads fit the 289 engine. I had very little money, so I decided to skip this step. The engine sealed up fine as measured using a vacuum gauge.

By mail order, I bought new 10:1 compression-ratio pistons and a ¾-race cam with dual springs for the valves. I put the piston pins in my mom's basement freezer, then heated the rods in a pan of warm water. I then used my Dad's hydraulic press to push the piston pins in.

I built up the new engine on the farm. My Dad helped me pull the old engine and drop in the new engine. After the new engine was bolted in, I decided to pull an "all-nighter" and work through the night to finish the installation.

About 7 AM the next morning, my Dad came to the garage, and he figured out that I had worked all night on the project. He made some comment like, "These young kids are crazy."

I then got a phone call from my friend Greg Taylor, who lived west of Cropsey. He wanted to help me install the engine so he could learn how to do it. I told him I was about done, but he could come if he wanted.

When Greg got to my house, I only had two tasks left. One task was installing the radiator and hoses. The second task was installing the distributor and spark plug wires. I gave him a choice, and he chose the distributor job. I asked him if he knew what he was doing because you have to get the firing order right. Greg said he had done it before at his relative's Champaign auto shop, where he used to work.

We both finished our tasks, and the big moment arrived to start up the hot rod engine. The headers were installed but not hooked up to the mufflers, which is fine for just trying out the engine.

I instructed Greg to keep his face and hands away from the top of the carburetor in case it backfired. I cranked the engine, and sure enough, it backfired through the carburetor. I knew that Greg had not installed the distributor and spark plugs correctly.

After being up all night, I was exhausted and about brain dead. I asked my Dad if he would install the distributor, and he agreed.

On the second attempt to start the engine, it roared to life and sounded great!

The next thing I knew, my mother ran out of the house to the garage and yelled at me to stop the engine because the loud exhaust noise was shaking her hanging plates off the wall!

It took me a few more days to finish the engine installation because of interference between the headers and the clutch mechanism. The 1965 Mustang with the souped-up engine ran fine, but it would not shift correctly all the time.

I was stumped and could not figure out why I had the shifting problem. I asked my Dad, but he was stumped also. I even asked those darned Chevy guys, Richie Sullens and Ben Meister, if they had any ideas, but they didn't know either.

Since I was quickly leaving for college, I did not have any time to tear the car apart again, so I kept on driving it with the shifting problem.

About two years later, when I sold the car, I figured out why it had the shifting problem. If you have a manual transmission, you need a little guide bushing at the end of the crankshaft, or you will get the kind of shifting problem I had. I had bought the short block with crankshaft from the Champaign junkyard, and it had been married with an automatic transmission with no guide bushing. At the time, this little guide bushing probably cost $3.

CHAPTER 3

University of Illinois (1974 to 1978)

Class Registration Day

The first trip I made from Fairbury to Champaign was to take the CLEP advanced placement tests. The second trip I made was by myself to register for classes.

In the fall of the 1974-1975 academic year, freshman registration was held in the old Huff Gym. To sign up for a class, you stood in line for 15 to 45 minutes to try to sign up for that class. If that class was full, you had to pick a different class and get in line for that class.

I finally got registered for my classes by the late afternoon. I was mentally exhausted from standing in all those lines.

The last task I had to accomplish was to get my student loan papers from the Fairbury Bank to the right university office. I had absolutely no idea how to do that.

About that time, a professor helping with registration day spotted me looking very confused. The professor came over to try and help me. He first asked me what town I was from.

I replied that I came from a farm near Fairbury, Illinois. He immediately smiled and said that was his hometown! I explained my student loan problem to him, and he went to another group of officials to confer with them. He came back and told me I had to go to the Administration Building on the main campus. He told me how to walk from Huff Gym to the Administration Building.

This Professor was Warren Wessels (1929-2018). He was a Fairbury native and later became Dean of the College of Agriculture.

Two Dale Maleys?

I left Huff Gym and walked to the Administration Building. It was probably between 4 and 5 PM when I arrived, and the clerk was probably tired of dealing with new freshman students all day and looking forward to quitting time at 5 PM.

I gave my student loan papers to her, and she disappeared and went into a back room. When she came back out to me, she said, "You have $18 in overdue book fines from the University Library, so I'm going to deduct that from your $1,000 student loan."

I told her this was my first time on the main campus, and I did not even know where the University Library was located. She then asked me for my Social Security number and disappeared again. When she came back, she said, "You are the second student with the name of Dale Maley, and I don't have to deduct the book fine from your loan." That finished my very long registration day at the University of Illinois.

Noble Hall

This was an old multi-story building where male students who did not have a specified roommate were sent. It was a pretty wild dorm to live in, and several of the scenes I experienced were almost identical to the 1978 Animal House movie!

Many of the all-male students in this dorm competed to see who had the loudest music and speaker equipment. After supper, it was so noisy throughout the building that studying was impossible. Every night after supper, I would walk about eight blocks to the University Library. I would study at the quiet Library until about midnight, when I would walk back to the dorm.

Noble Hall was near the Gardner Hall complex, which had a very large cafeteria. We could walk a short distance to this cafeteria to eat our meals.

Catastrophe During the First Week

As I attended my first classes, often the instructor would tell us that we were supposed to have already read the first few chapters of the textbook before the first class! The instructors told us we would be tested on these old chapters and new ones in just a few days. Boy, I was behind schedule before I even showed up for the first class of the semester!

In high school, Danny Ifft and Jeff Kilgus were two of my best friends. When I left for the University of Illinois, as far as I knew, they had not made any plans to attend college.

That first week of class, I got a phone call from one of my two friends. They said at the last minute they both decided to attend Parkland Junior College on the west side of Champaign. They invited me to go out with them to the bars that night.

I explained to them that I would love to go with them, but I was already way behind on my classwork and would have to pass on going with them.

Around midnight, I got a phone call from another friend going to Parkland. He said Danny and Jeff had been in a terrible car accident, and they were both in Burnham Hospital.

I walked from my dorm room to Burnham Hospital. By the time I arrived, Danny had been declared dead, and Jeff was in intensive care. Another girl in the car was badly injured, and a second girl had no injuries.

Danny was driving, and he did not see a stop sign at a T-intersection just south of the Assembly Hall. His car shot up a driveway and crashed into a brick wall.

I went to Danny's funeral in Fairbury. Jeff and the two girls all recovered from this tragic accident.

Roommates at Noble Hall

My two roommates were both from Antioch, Illinois. One was the son of a dentist, and the other's father was a hardware store owner.

My parents dropped me off at Noble Hall before my two roommates arrived. It was extremely hot, and there was no air conditioning in Noble Hall. About half an hour after my parents left me in the dorm room, they returned, and my dad had bought a box fan at the Champaign K-Mart. My roommates and I were eternally grateful to my parents for giving us that box fan!

I got along fairly well with my roommates. I found that I had to study extremely hard to get a C in most of my freshman classes. In some classes, my roommates would not study at all and get a grade of B on the same tests I took.

I finally asked them why they did not have to study for certain classes. They smiled and said they used the same textbook in their high school senior classes, so it was all review material for them. I guess it is a disadvantage to go to a small town high school like Fairbury compared to the Chicago suburban high schools.

Going Back to Fairbury Every Weekend

Because my girlfriend Connie was living and working in Fairbury, I went home every weekend in college. During my freshman and sophomore years, I rode with Dennis Helmers. I would leave my 1965 Mustang in a little unused shed on their farm on Sunday afternoons. On Friday night, I would ride back to Fairbury with Dennis. I then fired up my Mustang and drove it during the weekend.

My mother would do my laundry every weekend. In that era, Walton’s Department Store, where Connie worked in the office, stayed open until 9 PM on Friday nights, I would pick up Connie at 9 PM when she finished working at Walton’s. I often would study at home in the farmhouse on Saturdays and Sundays. Connie and I would have some type of date on Saturday nights.

About the only time I spent a weekend in Champaign was right before or during finals week. A lot of hours of intensive study were required to prepare for final exams in four or five classes.

Because I went home every weekend, I never attended any U of I football or basketball games.

Too Cold to Walk to Physics Classes

I had some 8 AM physics classes. The physics building was on the northeast portion of the huge campus, and I lived in the furthest southeast corner at Nobel Hall. On some super cold winter mornings, I skipped these physics classes.

These are the only classes I can remember skipping during my four years at the University of Illinois.

English Class

All freshman engineers had to take an English class. This class caused a lot of future engineers to flunk out of college. In my class, I got an assignment to write a paper about a topic of my choice, but I had to have a minimum of at least seven reference books.

Since I was into building hot rod engines and cars back in that era, I thought I would write a paper about something to do with cars. University officials touted the library as one of the biggest libraries in the world, so I thought I would have no problem finding my seven reference books.

But when I got to the Library, every single book about automotive topics was already checked out or never returned. With a pressing due date for the paper, I realized I had to switch strategies for the term paper. I decided to walk down the library shelves and try to find any topic that had seven books written about it. Once I found the books, I would write the paper about that topic.

The topic I ended up writing about was the 1954 Brown V. Board of Education court case. In this landmark case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional.

Although I was extremely bored with this topic compared to an automotive topic, I was able to complete the term paper assignment.

How to Keep Freshman Engineers Interested in Engineering

The first two years of college really have nothing to do with the field of engineering. It is only in years three and four that you take real engineering classes and do laboratory experiments.

Most freshman engineers get very bored just taking prerequisite classes and often switch to more interesting majors. To cope with this phenomenon, freshman engineers had to take a zero-credit lecture about engineering. In the first session, the lecturer said that engineering was a rewarding but challenging occupation. The lecturer told us to look to our right, then to our left, and only one of us would finish our engineering degrees.

We also watched the famous Galloping Gertie bridge failure movie from 1940 in Tacoma, Washington. Strong winds caused the suspension bridge to twist violently in an aeroelastic flutter until the center span finally tore apart and plunged into the Puget Sound. The engineers who designed this bridge were not aware that high winds could cause the bridge to sway until it failed.

First Time In My Life That Math Was a Major Problem

I loved math in grade school and high school. I scored very high on the math portion of the ACT college entrance exam. I almost got all A grades in high school math.

Engineers had to take calculus and differential equations for all four years of college.

My freshman year was the first time I was ever exposed to calculus. At the time, I did not realize my Professor was terrible at teaching introductory calculus to freshman students. I do not remember one “real world” example where knowing calculus might be useful. I had to study many hours in this first calculus class.

When I finished the final exam, I was pretty sure I did well enough to get an overall grade of C in this first calculus class. When I left the classroom after the final exam, one of my female classmates was sitting on the hallway floor crying. I asked her what was wrong. She said she was pretty sure she flunked the final exam and the class. She was sure she would have to drop out of college as a result.

I had different instructors for the next three years of college calculus and differential equations. I also got an A grade in each of these classes. I attribute my poor grade in my freshman year to a very poor professor.

The ironic thing about learning calculus at the University of Illinois is that I did not use it once in almost 40 years of working as an engineer!!

First Summer College Job

After finishing my freshman year at the University of Illinois, I returned to Fairbury and lived at my parents' farmhouse during the summer. I needed a summer job to continue to pay my way through college.

I found a job installing cellulose insulation for Maurer & Roth in Fairbury. The insulation was made by grinding up old newspapers and adding a chemical additive to make it more fire-resistant.

We used a medium-sized truck to hold all the equipment, including the bags of insulation and the main blower. We would dump bags of insulation into the hopper of the blower. The insulation would then be pumped through hoses into an attic or into the sidewalls of a house. We would have to use extension ladders and drill 1-inch diameter holes in all the exterior walls.

I ended up working for Maurer & Roth Insulating Company for two summers. We would leave Fairbury around 5 AM, so we got to the job site early. We wanted to finish the work before the attics really got hot around noon. We traveled about a 30-mile radius around Fairbury.

We did not typically insulate brick houses because it was so difficult to drill the 1-inch diameter holes in brick. In one case, the owner of a brick farmhouse kept pestering one of the insulation company owners to insulate his house. The insulation company owner finally gave in and agreed to try to insulate it.

One of the first holes I drilled in the brick wall was outside the master bedroom on the second story. I got the drill bit through the brick ok and then switched to a wood bit to drill through the sheeting board. All of a sudden, the bit grabbed and went deeply into the wall. It was a ½" size drill, and I could not keep it from going in.

I went inside the house and found my drill bit sticking through an oil painting hanging on the wall of the master bedroom! The homeowner did not get mad at me because we had told him how difficult the job would be. That was the last brick house we ever tried to insulate!

The Professor and 40 Dog Story

We got sent on a house insulating job to a location just east of Bloomington. It was a former country school house that had been converted to a small home. A woman lived there who was a professor at Illinois Wesleyan University in Normal, Illinois.

There were three of us on the insulating crew. We took turns doing different jobs each day. On this job, my job was to set up the blower on the truck and feed insulation into the blower.

A younger man, a brother of the owners, had the job of going into the house to cut the ropes on the window weights. He had to cut the ropes, push in a piece of steel, and cover any holes with cotton. If you did not cut the ropes, the window would not work after the wall cavity was filled with insulation.

The third man was the foreman, and his job was to set up the extension ladders and get the drills and cords ready to go.

I got the blower going, which is very loud. I then noticed the young man quickly came out of the house, and he lay down on the ground. He was trying to keep himself from throwing up. He handed the bag of cotton and steel shims to the foreman. The foreman then went into the house.

In just a few seconds, the foreman ran out of the house, and his complexion was very pale. He handed me the bag of cotton and steel shims.

When I entered the small vestibule room, there was a second door going into the main house. This door had a window, and I heard strange noises inside the house. I looked through the door window and saw a stack of about 40 wire cages with no animals in them. Then I saw a pack of 40 small to medium-sized dogs running through the house.

I opened the door, and my first step went "squish". I had stepped into a layer of dog feces and urine. The ammonia smell was incredibly strong, but I was used to this since we had confinement chickens and hogs on our farm. I worked very quickly and did my work in record time!

We were not happy with the company owner since he did not warn us about this house before we went. The next day, we asked him how he measured that house. He smiled and said he measured it from the outside of the house!

Rich Chicago Kids Flunking out of College

During my freshman year, I noticed that most of the students were from the suburban Chicago area. This makes sense since the Chicago area has about 80% of the population of Illinois.

In many cases, the parents of these students were executives in large companies or business owners. These students had no interest in studying at college and focused on partying. Since they were not paying the bill, it was not a big deal to flunk out of the U of I. They would then transfer to another college for the following semester.

My entire 4-year college expense was $10,000 from 1974 to 1978. Except for a $1,000 student loan, I worked summer jobs and paid the rest of the $9,000 college expense.

Since I was paying the bill and knew I would not get a good-paying job unless I applied myself, I was on the "mostly study and little party schedule." I vowed that for my own kids, I would try to save enough to pay ½ of their college, then I would get student loans for the rest. I would drill this plan into my children from an early age and make it clear they had to pay back the loans.

As a result of this strategy, both of my children applied themselves well in college, and my plan worked!

The first summer I worked during college, I made slightly more than the next year's total college cost. By the time I worked the 4th summer, I did not quite make enough for my last year in college. I had saved enough money from previous years to finish paying for my college.

Although I did not know it back in 1978, the fact that college expenses were going up faster than you could make in a summer job was the start of a trend. About this time, college costs rose much faster than inflation.

When I graduated from college in 1978, my starting salary was $18,000 as an engineer versus a total college cost of $10,000. This gave a ratio of 1.8 between salary and college cost. By the time my son Jacob finished college in 2005, this ratio had fallen to 1.0!

Letters

There was no email when I went to college. Connie and I would write each other letters and U.S. Mail them every week.

Sophomore Year at the U of I

For my sophomore year, I moved to a coed dorm called Gardner Hall. It was in the same block as the Nobel Hall dorm I lived in during my freshman year.

It was nice having girls in my dorm building, but there was one downside. While you were taking your shower in the central bathroom, one of your ornery friends might take your towel and your clothes. So when you finish your shower, you find out you are naked with no towel or clothes. About the only solution was to try to time your run back to your room when no young ladies were passing through your hallways!

Tough Dressing Roommate

My roommate was from the inner Chicago area and had a Spanish surname. When I first saw him, I was a little intimidated because he was a very "tough" looking character with his leather coat.

As I got to know him, I found out he was a very meek and friendly man. I asked him why he dressed in such a tough-looking fashion. He explained that where he grew up, you needed to look as tough as possible so other people did not attack or assault you.

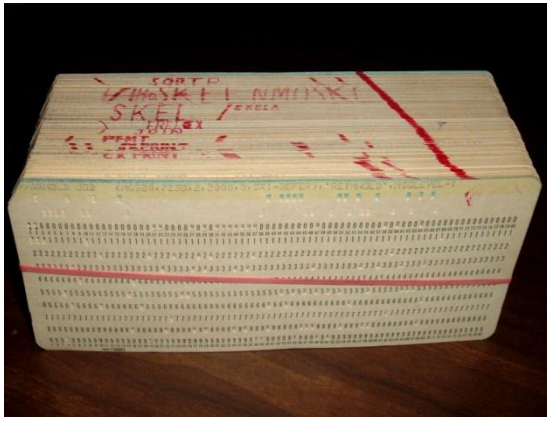
Computer Drafting in 1975

I was still bored to death taking all the prerequisite classes required in the first two years of college. All engineers had to take a manual drafting class, which has some relationship to engineering work.

I learned to manually draw on paper using a drafting table and T-square.

For our final project in this manual drafting class, we had to create one computer-drawn blueprint. First, we manually drew up the object we wanted to make a computer drawing of. We then calculated the x, y, and z coordinates for each point at the end of a line on the object. We then punched these coordinate numbers into the mainframe computer punch cards.

You took your stack of cards and gave them to the computer room operator. He fed them into the mainframe computer system. You went to the pen plotter to watch your job make the computer drawing.

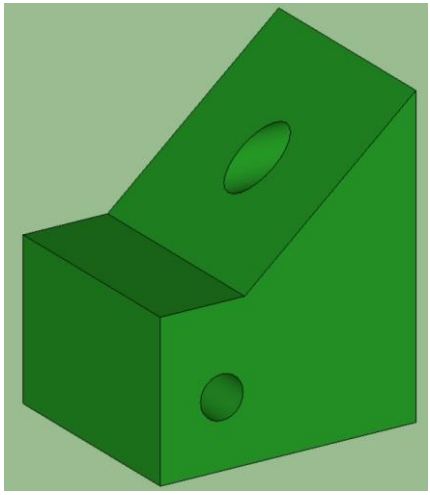


Computer punch cards. Each line of code took 1 card

I got very excited when my job finally started to be plotted out using the large pen plotter. When my drawing was about halfway completed, the pen plotter arm took off and tried to go off the page, ending the plot!

That meant I had made a mistake in the coordinates, which caused the pen plotter to malfunction. I had to find the mistake, make new computer cards, and give the stack back to the operator.

I was very proud when I finally got my first computer-drafted image completed for that class. I framed it and displayed it in my home office for many years.



Isometric view similar to the drafting class project.

PLATO

In the 1960s, the University of Illinois developed the PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) system. It was the world's first generalized computer-based learning system. In the 1970s, it evolved into a massive, global network of high-tech terminals, predating the modern Internet by decades as the first thriving online community.

Circa 1975, I took tests on the PLATO system for my Economics 101 class. I remember it was weird that after you answered the last question on the exam, the computer immediately gave you your test score!

Junior Year at the University of Illinois

I moved into an apartment in Urbana with three other guys. I knew two of these guys because they were my past roommates, or I had classes with them.

About this time, I bought a more reliable used 1974 Mustang Mach One, a four-cylinder car. Each weekend, I drove it back and forth to Fairbury to see Connie.

Until that year, the University of Illinois had never closed due to extreme weather. The temperature plunged down to -20F and the university closed for the day. Most normal students would have stayed home for the day and tried to keep warm.

We were not normal college students. We got a car started and immediately went to the liquor store to restock on beer to drink!

Engineering Classes Much More Enjoyable

In my junior year, we started to take actual engineering classes, including laboratory classes. I enjoyed these classes much more than the boring prerequisite classes we had to take in the first two years of college.

Computer Science Class

All engineers had to take a class where they learned to write programs in FORTRAN. I liked this class but did not like the exams. For the exams, you were graded not only on being able to write a program, but also on how efficiently you wrote the code. I could write the program, but I was not efficient in terms of the lines of code required.

To write a FORTRAN program, the basic steps were:

1. Write the program on notebook paper or index cards
2. Go to a computer room, lay down your notebook paper, and then keypunch each line of code onto a computer card
3. Hand the stack of cards to the computer operator
4. The computer operator handed you the printout from your programs.

You often had to stand in line to get your turn at the keypunch machine. I noticed that some students looked over the shoulder of the person using the keypunch machine. The student would quickly copy the other student's lines of code and then use them for his program.

Uncle Dale Dameron Saved My College Degree

Unfortunately, Maurer & Roth went out of business and closed their doors. I no longer had a summer job to pay for my next year's college expenses.

I was working on repairing my Grandma Dameron's house in early summer. Uncle Dale Dameron stopped by to visit with me. He told me that he heard I needed a summer job and he could give me a job if I wanted it. I immediately said yes!!

Without the job at my Uncle's plumbing business, I don't know how I could have completed my college degree.

Dale Dameron and Wade Harris

Wade Harris and Dale Dameron initially formed their own plumbing business in 1964. After a couple of years, Wade requested that he be allowed to stop being an owner and become an employee. Wade worked for Dameron Plumbing until he retired.

Natural Curiosity

On one of my first jobs at Dameron Plumbing, I learned how to "sweat" copper water pipe joints. The basic process is:

1. Clean the copper pipe and fitting using steel wool or a steel brush.
2. Apply flux solution to the mating copper parts for the joint using a small brush. The flux cleans the copper and allows a better bond.
3. Heat the joint using a propane torch.

4. Rub the solder onto the hot joint until it melts, and you see it around the whole joint.
5. Wipe the joint clean using a glove.

I was totally fascinated with how this process worked. It was amazing to me that this joint would hold 40 psi of water pressure for many decades without leaking.

When I got back to my Uncle's plumbing shop that night, I sweated a joint, let it cool down, and then hacksawed it in half so I could see what the joint looked like.

My Uncle Dale happened to come into the back of the shop and asked what I was doing.

Years later, my Uncle Dale told this story to a family crowd at a wedding. My Uncle Dale said that he immediately knew he had lost me as a future plumber, and I was more likely to become an engineer!

Had Three Excellent Teachers at Dameron Plumbing

Uncle Dale Dameron (1928-2017) taught me basic plumbing skills. Cousin Lynn Dameron (1946-2021) taught me how to electrically wire houses and how to set up residential HVAC systems. Wade Harris (1924-1993) taught me how to make plumbing repairs and how to do sheet metal work.

HVAC is an acronym for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. In a house, it is your furnace, the air-conditioner, the ductwork, exhaust, registers, and a thermostat for the control system.

Wade Harris served in the Air Force during World War II. He was shot down over Germany and spent the rest of the War in a German POW camp. Like most WWII veterans, he hardly ever told stories about the war.

Wade only told one story about his time as a POW. He said his camp was full of Americans, British, French, and Russian soldiers. The

Germans hated the Russian soldiers the most, so they assigned the Russians to clean the latrines every day.

The Germans did provide the Russians with a crude vacuum system to use to suck out the latrines. The Russians poured a low-grade fuel into the tank, lit the fuel, and the burning of the fuel would create enough suction to clean the latrines using a hose.

The Russians despised having to do the latrine duty. They figured out that if they obtained a little high-grade fuel and used it instead of the low-grade fuel, the tank would be ruined and they would no longer have to do latrine cleaning duty.

Many of the other prisoners learned about the Russian scheme. When the day arrived, they substituted the higher-grade fuel, and the tank blew up. The Russians danced with joy at the success of their plan. POW soldiers from other countries applauded the ingenuity of the Russians.

All the POWs were jubilant until the next day after the explosion. The Germans forced the Russians to clean the latrines just using their hands!

Lifelong Skills

Looking back, while I worked at Dameron Plumbing, I learned skills that were useful for the rest of my life. I could modify or repair my own house. I could also help my relatives with their home improvement projects or repairs.

Senior Year at the University of Illinois

I moved into one of the Hessel Park apartments on Kirby Avenue just west of the main campus. My roommate was a student I had met in my Ag Engineering classes. He moved in, but quickly he quit coming to the apartment. He then moved in with his girlfriend. I basically had a 2-bedroom apartment to myself my senior year.

Driving to Class

Because I lived quite a way from the main campus, I would drive to the main campus area. Because money was tight, I would park far enough away from the main campus that parking was free. If you parked close to campus, you had to feed the parking meter.

Burned out on McDonald's

There was a McDonald’s drive-through restaurant on the main street from my apartment to the campus. I got in the habit of eating there every day versus cooking my own meals.

After one solid semester of eating at McDonald's, I got burned out on their food and switched to making my own meals. I did not eat at a McDonald's for many years after that!

My food budget in those days was $10 per week. I ate a lot of spaghetti and Campbell’s soup.

The Cockroach Invasion

I had never really seen cockroaches until I moved into the Hessel Park apartment. One night, I turned on the kitchen light and saw hundreds of cockroaches on the counter and even behind the refrigerator!

I figured out they were coming into my apartment from an adjacent apartment through an opening below the kitchen sink. I declared War on the cockroaches and managed to kill them off. I blocked the hole they were coming in as well.

Fun Engineering Classes

I really enjoyed my senior-level classes. I enjoyed my Fluid Mechanics classes, including the laboratory exercises. Many things that I learned in this class I would apply later as a working engineer.

The Fluid Mechanics instructor tried to talk me into going to grad school and working for him while in grad school. I liked this

professor, but I was broke and anxious to start earning money as an engineer.

Ag Engineering Classes

I had some very good professors in this department. I really enjoyed doing laboratory tests like the heat balance of an agricultural tractor in a dyno cell. Little did I know that I would be running similar tests a few years later when I worked at Ford Tractor.

I also learned how to write up laboratory results, including explaining why some things did not necessarily agree with the theory. This training made it easy to write up 762 Technical reports during my career at Caterpillar.

Surveying Class

As part of an Ag Engineering class, we learned how to be surveyors for a day. We surveyed a circular path around the south campus using transits, height sticks, axes, and long steel tape measures.

This understanding of surveying helped me later in life for researching and writing about early surveying done in Livingston County.

FORTRAN Programs

We had to write FORTRAN computer programs as part of several different Ag Engineering classes. One of these projects was writing a program that would predict what angle a tractor would flip over backward, pulling a heavy load up a hill.

For another class, we had to design the HVAC system for a confinement hog house. Since my dad had a confinement hog house operation, this project was personally relevant to me.

This was the first time that I learned how to create computer simulations of natural events. For example, the weather cycles each year from cold in the winter to warm in the summer and back again.

One can approximate this cycle by using a cosine or sine-type repeating wave. Each day, the temperature can randomly vary within a given range. One can use a random number generator to figure out the temperature on any given day.

By setting up a mathematical and computer model of the hog house, you can determine how much heat needs to be added to the hog house in the wintertime. You can also use some engineering judgment and decide that you can rent some auxiliary heat on those rare, extremely cold days.

Visits by Connie

Once in a while, on her day off, on a Thursday, Connie would drive from Fairbury to Champaign. We almost always went to the Ponderosa steak house for lunch when she visited.

Engagement

During my senior year, we got engaged and set a wedding date of June 4, 1978. I would complete my college degree around May 15, so we had a couple of weeks before we got married.

Job Interviews

During the Spring Semester, companies would come to the U of I and interview candidates for jobs with their companies.

On Saturday mornings, we would line up at the Student Union, then go inside and sign up for time slots with the companies we wanted to interview with.

The general process used in that era was:

1. Conduct an interview on campus.
2. The company decides to ask the candidate to travel to their facility for further interviews.
3. The company offers a job to the candidate.

I think I had about 20 on-campus interviews, then traveled to about 16 companies and received about 12 job offers in the spring of 1978.

1st Airplane Trip

One of my early interviews involved flying from the little airport south of Champaign to Chicago. I had never flown on a plane before this.

Connie told me that flying was great. You got to watch a movie, it was pretty quiet, and you got served food. She was basing this on her flight to visit her sister in Hawaii.

I was very disappointed in my 1st plane flight. It was a "puddle jumper" prop plane that was extremely crowded and noisy!

John Deere

Because I grew up on a farm with John Deere tractors and combines, if I had my choice, I would have liked to work for John Deere.

It turned out that John Deere only hired one U of I engineering grad, and he was my phantom roommate! He had a perfect straight-A average, and that is why Deere hired him.

Warner Electric Brake & Clutch

This company was very interesting to me. It was located in the Rockford area. You were assigned a new product to develop. If this product were successful, you could continue to manage the product and expand your role with the company.

At the time, I thought, "I don't really know what I want to do for my career, and I don't want to limit my career to just brakes and clutches."

Eventually, I ended up working for Caterpillar for 37 years in the niche area of diesel fuel injection!

Trane Company

Another interesting company was the Trane Company. They paid you a small salary for 1 or 2 years of training. Then you became a sales engineer, likely working in a large city on large commercial-sized HVAC systems. You were likely to earn over $100,000 if you were successful.

At the time of graduation, I was broke and wanted to start earning money. I also did not want to live in a big city. I turned down their job offer.

One year later, the company tracked me down through my parents. They said that often new engineers are not happy with their 1st job selection, and if I were interested, I could still come to work for them. I thought this was a rather unique job recruiting method.

Ford Tractor

The bad news about taking a job with Ford Tractor was that I would be living in suburban Detroit. The good news was that they had a two-year new engineer training program. You would have four assignments, with each one lasting six months. At the end of the two-year training program, you could choose which department to work in.

At the time, I did not really know what type of engineering job I would like. I reasoned that if I finished the Ford training program, because of the prestige of the Ford company, it was very likely I could find a new job at many different companies.

I accepted the job with Ford Tractor.

Key Lessons Learned from the University of Illinois

It has now been almost 50 years since I graduated from the University of Illinois with a B.S. degree in Agricultural Engineering. I received a well-rounded engineering education over the last two years at the university.

One of the key things I learned was how to design and conduct laboratory experiments like the heat balance of a tractor in a dyno cell. Coupled with this is the ability to write technical reports that are clear and explain whatever topic is being investigated.

The basics of fluid mechanics I learned at the University of Illinois were extremely relevant and helpful to my jobs at both Ford Tractor and Caterpillar Inc.

In retrospect, it was probably a good thing I did not know that most of the classes I took the first two years at the U of I were worthless in terms of my career as an engineer. If I had known that, I would have had great difficulty applying myself to study for those classes!

CHAPTER 4

1st Job at Ford Tractor (1978 to 1979)

1978 Marriage

My wife attended the Fairbury Presbyterian Church, so we got married there. I was active while in high school with the Fairbury Methodist Church. In fact, I was president of the youth group for one year.

The minister at the Presbyterian Church required that couples planning on getting married attend a counseling session with him. We met with him and reviewed our backgrounds and education.

At the conclusion of the counseling session, the Presbyterian minister said he only had one concern. He observed there was quite an educational difference between us since I was a college graduate and my wife had just finished high school.

I don't remember for sure, but I think my response was that I had learned there was a lot more to life than "book learning," and we would be fine as a married couple.

Visiting Grandma Dameron in the Nursing Home

She had been in failing health for several months. She was bedridden and unable to attend the wedding ceremony. So after the church services were over, we went to the nursing home to pay her a visit. It is not too often you see a new bride in her wedding dress in a nursing home.

In retrospect, I think she “willed herself” to continue living until the wedding. We got married on June 4, 1978. While we were on our honeymoon, she passed away on June 7, 1978.

Honeymoon Interruptions

After the wedding at the church, we went to her parents' house in Fairbury for a brief celebration. We then drove to the Holiday Inn in Champaign as our first stop on our way to New Orleans.

As we prepared to go to bed, a major problem arose. It seems that one of my wife’s sisters had sewn her nightgown closed such that she could not wear it that night!

After a while, we both fell asleep because it was such an eventful day. We were not asleep for long when we were woken up by the hotel phone in our room. It was my Aunt Florence Dameron calling to wish us a happy honeymoon!

The surprises continued the next morning when brother-in-law David Roth called our hotel room and told us that he was taking us out for breakfast in Champaign.

4 Stars is Not Really 4 Stars

Before the Internet, you planned a trip by contacting the Chamber of Commerce of the city you wanted to visit. The chamber would mail you a packet of information about things to do, restaurants, and hotels.

When we were planning our honeymoon, we did not have very much money. We wanted to stay in the historic French Quarter. Connie asked me how many stars the hotel she picked should be rated at.

I told her to go for 4 stars since we could not afford a 5-star hotel.

When we arrived in New Orleans at our hotel, we were very disappointed. It was in the French Quarter, but was old and "dumpy". We stayed there the first night, then switched to a nicer hotel.

We found out the city of New Orleans had passed laws preventing any new hotels in the French Quarter. The only hotels were old hotels. These old hotels were not nearly as nice as the newer hotels just outside the French Quarter.

First Rental House in 1978

We did not have any money, so we decided to rent a house until we could save our money and buy a house.

We found a nice ranch in Southfield, Michigan. It was a brick 2-bedroom ranch. It had an open carport attached to the main ranch. We had a pet cat from the farm as well.

The only people we knew in the Detroit area were Ron and Kelly Nelson. I had many classes with Ron at the U of I. Connie and I went to their wedding in the Quad Cities area.

I bought a miniature charcoal grill, and we cooked out under the carport. Dennis and Cindy Helmers visited us when we lived at that ranch house.

Ford Tractor

The first of my four different training assignments was in the Drive-train & Rear Axle Design department. I was assigned a drafting table with a desk. I was in a sea of engineers as far as the eye could see. There were over 1,000 engineers and drafting tables in one large room.

The company was getting ready to introduce the largest 2-wheel agricultural tractor they had ever made. Two prototype tractors were placed on endurance testing in Texas. They were run around the clock pulling heavy loads.

Unfortunately, one of the two tractors had a massive mechanical failure, which broke the main rear axle housing that held the rear of the tractor together. Time was very limited to find the root cause and correct the problem before the new tractor went into production.

The company had one senior engineer who did most of the serious engineering calculation work. He was assigned to use 3D computer finite element programming to understand the failure and determine how to fix the design. In that era, it took a couple of months to do this type of computer analysis work. Today, it can be done in a couple of days.

The test track personnel bolted extra steel pieces to the broken tractor so it could keep running.

I got the assignment to analyze the gear train design of every model of tractor in production at Ford (about eight different size models). I was to develop the calculations and predict how many hours each design would operate before it failed under heavy loads. My end goal was to make one chart that could be reviewed with a Ford Tractor Vice-President.

There were no personal computers at that time. All I had was a Texas Instruments programmable calculator. My first step was to use one of my U of I mechanical engineering textbooks to develop the right formulas to use for the analysis.

Because this was such a high-visibility project involving a Vice President, I did not want to make a mistake. When I got my basic methodology figured out, I reviewed it with the most senior engineer in the company. He reviewed my methodology and said it looked good to him.

I then worked day and night doing the calculations required to make the summary chart. That was the first time I got paid overtime as an engineer.

Everyone, including the Ford Vice-President, was pleased with my summary chart.

I wrote up quite a few test requests for our Test Department to perform as part of the solution to the broken tractor issue.

Short-Sleeve Work Dress Shirts for Life

In 1978, Ford was still using ink to draw some engineering blueprints. I was very afraid I might get this ink on my long-sleeve white shirts. I switched to only short-sleeve work shirts to avoid this problem. For the rest of my 40-year working career, I only wore short-sleeve shirts to work!

Second Rotational Training Assignment in the Test Department

I really enjoyed my 2nd training assignment in the product test department. What was interesting to me was that the Senior Test Engineer saw that I had written many test requests as a Design Engineer, so he handed them to me to complete in the Test Department.

Because of my training at the University of Illinois Agricultural Engineering department, it was easy for me to learn how Ford did their tests and how they wrote up their test results.

I was able to duplicate the same failure mode experienced in Texas by using a dynamometer test cell in our engineering headquarters. It is not often you get to destroy a tractor on purpose!

Helping a Fellow New Engineer

Ford had a standardized test called the "Air to Boil" test. Because Ford's tractors had to operate correctly in any country in the world, they wanted to make sure the tractor could still operate correctly

when the ambient temperature reached 130F. For the lab test, you placed a tractor in a test cell. You then slowly increased the air temperature in the cell until the radiator boiled over. To pass the test, it must not boil over until the temperature is above 130F. This test was very similar to the testing we did at the U of I Agricultural Engineering dyno cell.

At the same time I was hired into Ford Tractor, a black student who grew up in Detroit was also hired. He was in the same training program as I. Unfortunately, he had not grown up on a farm and knew nothing about tractors.

Some of the long-time Ford employees decided to have some fun with this new engineer. They told him he needed to run an “Air to Boil” test on a Deutz tractor. He came to me because he could not figure out the test request.

I explained to him that Deutz tractors were air-cooled. They did not use water as the cooling medium like most tractors did. Therefore, there was no radiator or water system to boil over on a Deutz tractor. I explained that the guys were messing with him.

He seemed like a nice kid, so I took him out back to our yard, where we had both Ford and competitors’ tractors in stock. I gave him a crash course in farming and tractors 101. After my short training class, the guys could no longer mess with him.

Building a Shift on the Go Transmission Test Rig

Many European farmers had small fields and spent a lot of time shifting as they traveled from field to field. In that era, you could not shift Ford tractors "on the go" while you were driving them. You had to stop the tractor, then shift the transmission. Ford decided to develop a shift-on-the-go transmission, and they needed a test rig to endurance test it.

I was given the assignment of designing and building this test rig. I liked the project because I was doing real mechanical engineering design work.

The Ford tractor design headquarters where I worked was a UAW union shop, but I could make my own steel parts for the test rig. I got to saw the steel pieces and drill holes using a drill press.

My next step in building this test rig was to get some steel angle iron frames welded together in the Ford machine shop.

About this time, my supervisor called me to his office. He introduced me to a female engineering college student who was going to work at Ford during the summer as part of an intern program. The supervisor asked me to use this student on my test rig building project.

I knew if I carried the angle iron frames across the shop to the welding shop, the supervisor would likely complete my work in a day or two.

At that point, I got an idea. If the female engineering student carried the frames to the shop, it was very likely that the work would be completed much faster.

It turned out that my hunch was correct. The female student did not even make it all the way to the welding shop. Three employees from the weld shop stopped their work and ran out to meet her, and they carried the steel frames the rest of the way to their shop. They immediately stopped all their work in progress and started doing my welding work. They completed the work in a couple of hours, and they even carried the welded angle iron frames across the shop over to my work area!

This was the most expensive project I had done in my short working engineering career. I spent about $50,000 on the materials for this project. I completed the project, and the Engineering Manager demonstrated my new test rig to our Vice-President.

Buying Coffee Goes a Long Way

When I started working at Ford, I realized I was going to have to order steel parts for my various projects. I went to the machine shop, introduced myself to the shop supervisor, and bought him a cup of

coffee. He was very proud of his shop and gave me a grand tour. I guessed that he had an inventory list of the types of steel he kept in stock. He gladly shared this list and gave me a copy.

I next designed some prototype parts, and I made sure to use materials the shop kept in inventory. At the same time, a cocky young engineer who was in the training program also designed and ordered some steel parts.

I got my parts completed in just a couple of days. The cocky young engineer had to wait several weeks for his parts because he specified steel that was not kept in stock and had to be procured.

I learned that a simple cup of coffee can often get a lot of favors in about any size company!

Maley – You Almost Killed the Vice-President!

When I was working in the Test Department, I did all kinds of testing using tractor components or sometimes the whole tractor.

Conducting long-hour endurance testing can be very expensive. Test Engineers would try to save time and money by getting their parts tested on another Test Engineer's endurance test.

I needed to run a tractor around the clock and have the PTO drive on the tractor engage and disengage many times under load to see how long the PTO clutch pack would last. This test was typically done with the tractor set up outdoors around the test track we had in the back of our facility.

Another Test Engineer heard that I was doing this test. He asked me if I could also test a new radiator fan design on the same tractor I was using. I said sure, and I had the mechanics install his special test fan blade on my tractor.

The test ran fine for a couple of days. One day I came into work, and one of the Test Track technicians yelled at me, "Maley – You almost killed our vice-president!"

It seems our vice-president had a very important customer he was touring through all the facilities, and he also toured the test track. Apparently, the radiator fan broke into pieces, and a big piece flew up in the air and landed in the area of the Vice-President. Fortunately, no one was injured, and I was not fired!

Dale’s Mustang on the Maley farm.

CHAPTER 5

Back to Fairbury (1979 to 1981)

I completed my 3rd training period and entered the 4th and last segment in 1979. The 4th assignment was in the Chassis Design Department. I found this assignment very boring because there were no moving parts in this department!

Connie and I did not like living in suburban Detroit. We had saved our money and bought a small house in Farmington Hills. Her dad, Lloyd Wells, loaned us the money for the down payment. We paid him back fairly quickly.

Do I Switch Jobs from Ford Tractor to John Deere?

The only U of I engineer that Deere hired when we graduated was my phantom roommate, Chris Myers. Ron Nelson, who went with me to Ford Tractor, contacted Chris, who helped him get hired at John Deere.

I was about to contact Chris and Ron to ask if they could get me hired on at Deere as well.

Newspaper Ad Changed My Life

Caterpillar Tractor Co. announced it was building a new plant in Pontiac, Illinois, just 15 miles away from our hometown of Fairbury. My mother saw an ad for engineers in one of the local newspapers. She clipped out the ad and mailed it to me in Farmington Hills, Michigan.

I contacted Caterpillar and arranged for an interview in Pontiac. The department that was hiring engineers was the Plant Engineering Department. This department was responsible for setting up all the machinery in the new plant. Once the plant was operational, this department was responsible for both production and facility maintenance. This department was also responsible for the waste-treatment plant and the boiler house.

The hiring manager was an experienced Caterpillar employee and was a very charismatic guy. The manager was impressed by my background in working for contractors, including the house insulation crew, and by my uncle's plumbing shop. I had worked as an electrician, plumber, and residential HVAC technician.

I Need Help Spending All This Money

The Plant Engineering Supervisor was a very interesting guy. He had transferred from the California Caterpillar plant to Pontiac. When he started the interview with me, he brought out a 3-inch-thick 3-ring binder.

He then asked me what the most expensive project I had worked on at Ford Tractor was. I told him about the shift-on-the-go transmission testing machine I designed and built for $50,000.

He then told me that every sheet in his thick notebook was for a $50,000 project for production machine installations and equipment. The Supervisor asked me if I wanted to help him spend all that money!

I think my pay increase from Ford Tractor to Caterpillar was from $21,000 to $28,000. I accepted the job.

I started working immediately at the Caterpillar Pontiac Plant and left Connie by herself in Farmington Hills for a couple of months. She continued working and saving her money. We needed time to figure out how to sell the Farmington Hills house and find somewhere to live in Fairbury.

Newspapers in 2026: Obsolete

In 1978, newspapers played a key role in our daily lives. That employment ad changed my life forever. Today, most young people never even read a newspaper!

Lost the Charismatic Manager

Shortly after I started working at Pontiac, the charismatic manager who hired me was transferred to the Caterpillar factory in Decatur, Illinois. To fill his Pontiac Plant job, Caterpillar transferred in a replacement from the Caterpillar Mapleton Foundry. Our new manager had been the Maintenance Manager at the Caterpillar Mapleton Foundry.

The new manager was not charismatic. He was a hard-nosed manager accustomed to managing a very tough bunch of workers at the foundry. He had quite a temper and supposedly held the record for getting mad and kicking a hard hat the farthest distance at the foundry. He also had a reputation for having one-half of the Union workforce fired at any given time.

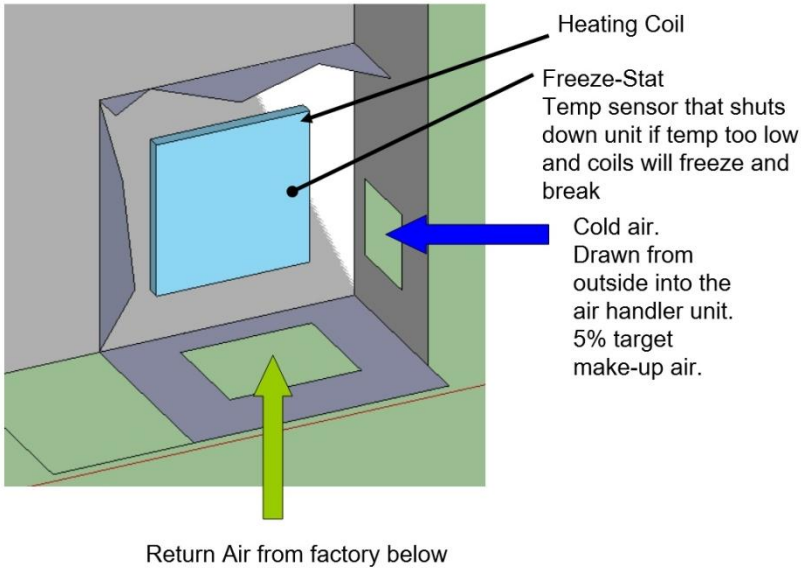
I got along fine with the new manager. I found out he had very limited experience in machine installations and building systems.

1st Big Engineering Problem at Caterpillar

In the Fall of 1979, the weather started getting colder. We started to occupy parts of the new building.

This 800,000-square-foot building had large HVAC units housed in long rooftop penthouses. All of a sudden, these HVAC units would shut down due to a sensor called a freeze stat. This sensor protected the large coils in the HVAC from freezing and breaking if it sensed air that was too cold.

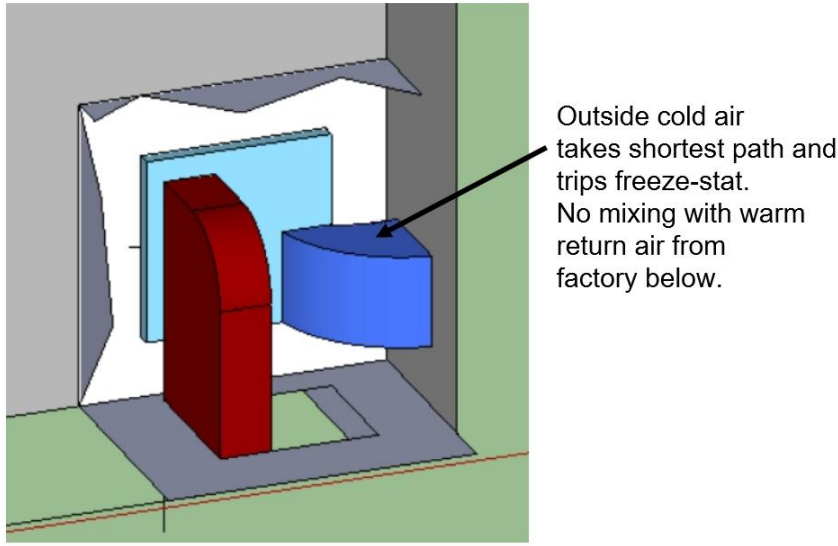
The HVAC contractor and the engineers who designed and installed these large units were stumped about how to solve the problem. The building had three penthouses, each with maybe 6 very large HVAC units. This meant a total of 18 large HVAC units would not function properly.


Heating Coil
Freeze-Stat
Temp sensor that shuts down unit if temp too low and coils will freeze and break
Cold air.
Drawn from outside into the air handler unit.
5% target make-up air.
Return Air from factory below

One of my first major assignments at Caterpillar was solving this problem that had stumped other companies and engineers. I had experience with much smaller residential HVAC systems and some small commercial boilers. These Caterpillar systems were massive in size compared to what I had worked on before.

I conducted many laboratory experiments at the U of I and was trained for 6 months as a Test Engineer at Ford Tractor. To understand the root cause of the problem, I instrumented one HVAC unit by moving a $5.00 thermometer around the 8-by-8-foot coil unit, recording the temperature at each square foot of coil.

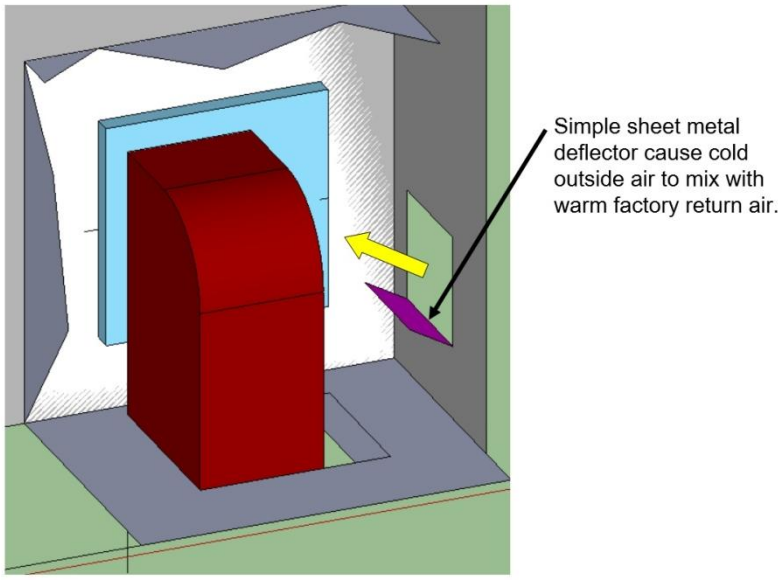
In this unit, the warm main air return came up from the factory into the bottom of the box, then turned 90 degrees and entered the coils. Make-up air came from the side of the penthouse, turned 90 degrees, hugged the penthouse wall, and went into the big coil. You want about 5% make-up fresh air for odor and health reasons.



My simple instrumentation test with the thermometer showed that the problem was a lack of mixing between the hot and cold air streams. Since the air was not mixing, the very cold outside air tripped the freeze-stat protecting the large coil.

Once I identified the root cause, I had to design a simple fix that would work across all 18 large HVAC units. I did some more experiments and solved the problem by simply adding a sheet-metal deflector to the fresh-air duct, which directed the cold air to the top to mix with the warm air.

Once I verified that the simple fix worked, I supervised a sheet metal contractor in modifying all units.



I received quite a few compliments from various parties for finding the root cause and fixing all 18 large HVAC units quickly and at a relatively low cost.

The A-Frame in Timber Ridge

In 1979, mortgage rates went so high that banks had to stop making loans because they would exceed "loan shark" rates set by the Illinois Usury Law!

We decided to rent for a year or two until mortgage rates came back down. We rented a unique A-Frame house in the Timber Ridge subdivision in Fairbury.

Raccoon Casserole

On the farm, I was raised to believe that you never criticized your mother's cooking.

When I first got married, I was pleased to find that Connie was a very good cook. She tried a new tuna casserole recipe out on me when we lived in the A-frame. I really did not like the taste of this casserole, but I was afraid to tell her that I did not like it.

We had raccoons living in our backyard at Timber Ridge because quite a few neighbors fed them food scraps.

So rather than tell Connie I did not like her cooking, I snuck the plate of casserole out the back door and then scraped it onto the ground so the raccoons would eat it.

She eventually found out I was serving her casserole to the raccoons. To this day, she claims she still has that recipe and will serve Raccoon Casserole to me again if I misbehave!!

Investment Journey Begins

Circa 1976, when I was still in college, I was visiting one of my hometown buddies at his house. When I walked by his brother's bedroom, I noticed a magazine titled ***Money*** lying on the bed. I picked it up and scanned through it. It looked interesting, so I went ahead and subscribed. I was likely one of the first subscribers to Money magazine since its start in 1972.

How Do I Keep Some of the Money I Will Earn Over My Engineering Career?

I can remember sitting at my home office desk in the A-frame at Timber Ridge. I had a new Texas Instruments programmable calculator. It would be a few more years before personal computers became available.

Using my TI calculator, I figured that I would earn a total of $1.3 million. So the question I asked myself was, “After 30 years of working and I retire, how do I assure that I get to keep some of this money for myself for my retirement years?”

Adult Education Class

Within two years of graduating from college with my Engineering degree, I had gotten married and bought a house. I noticed in the newspaper that the local high school was offering an adult education class on investing. I signed up for the class. In college engineering classes, I learned a few financial concepts, such as compound interest, payback time for capital investments, and return on investment. I had not really learned anything about personal finance in college.

The local Edward D. Jones broker taught the high school adult education class. I believe he used the class to find new clients for his brokerage. He used Venita VanCaspel's 1978 book, ***The New Money Dynamics***, as the course textbook.

Older Ladies Very Upset in the Adult Education Class

I had learned about compound interest in some of my engineering classes at the University of Illinois. One night in class, the teacher spent a few minutes explaining the magical phenomena of compound interest. For example, if you invested $1.00 when you were 20 years old and achieved the average stock market return of 10%, then your investment would be worth $45 when you were 60 years old, or 40 years later.

I noticed that several of the older ladies in the class were very upset about something during this compound interest discussion. At the next class break, I asked them what they were upset about. They replied that they were upset because nobody had explained the power of compound interest when they were young. They said that now, when they were in their 60s, it was too late for them to multiply their wealth using compound interest.

Key Lessons Learned from the Adult Education Class

One of the key concepts from her book was the idea that, if you want to increase your wealth, you must "own versus loan." This means you want to own assets rather than not own assets and be in debt. Successful investors increase their net worth by owning assets, not loaning out their money.

She also stressed that to build wealth, you must live below your means so you have money left over to invest in assets. She suggested using automatic investment to pay yourself first. If you set up automatic investing, then you can't spend money you don't see.

Another key concept was the power of compound interest. Venita's concept of your investment creating children (interest) who beget another generation of children still sticks in my mind 50 years after first reading about the concept.

This book is also where I first learned about stock mutual funds and their advantages. She explained how mutual funds worked and that investing in stocks was one of the few ways to create wealth over time.

One of the main conclusions I drew from this adult education course was that I should consider investing in stock mutual funds to increase my wealth.

Which Stock Mutual Fund to Invest In?

After completing the adult education class, I decided to invest in several different stock mutual funds. The question I faced was: "Which funds do I invest in?" Since I subscribed to Money magazine, I had access to the one-, three-, five-, and ten-year historical performance of stock mutual funds. Although historic performance doesn't necessarily predict future performance, the only data available was historic.

Since funds had performed differently over the time period selected, which time period should you use to select the best fund? Should you use one-year, three-year, or five-year historic performance?

After struggling with this question for a while, I decided to use the historic five-year performance. I picked three no-load stock mutual funds with strong five-year track records. I opened an account for each of the funds and began investing money into them every month.

After a year had passed, I noticed that one of the funds had slipped out of the top tier of performers. After two years, another of my three funds had started to slip out of the top-performing tier. I kept investing in the three funds because I could not find a better way to forecast which fund would perform best in the future.

The question of how to pick the stock mutual fund that will perform best in the future continued to haunt me. Money magazine continued to run its typical annual headline stories with titles like "Choose These 5 Hot Funds Now", but if you followed the performance of their choices over time, their choices could not maintain good long-term performance either.

I would not be able to answer this question until my ISU (Illinois State University) MBA Finance class in 1990.

CHAPTER 6

Living in Fairbury and Working at Caterpillar Pontiac (1980 to 1990)

Owning our First Fairbury House

In a small town like Fairbury, with a population of about 3,800, houses are only available for purchase when someone dies or gets divorced.

In our case, a couple living at 604 North First Street got divorced. This house was a tri-level with three bedrooms and a partial basement. We purchased this home for about $67,000 in 1981.

This home was built by Alvin Friedman circa 1968. He built about three homes. In each of these homes, he installed 3/8" thick drywall on the walls and then glued brown paneling on top of the drywall. When you removed the paneling, the glue ripped most of the paper off the drywall, rendering it unusable.

We methodically remodeled the whole house and replaced the dark brown paneling with lighter colored drywall. I removed the old paneling and 3/8" thick drywall, leaving just the wall studs. I installed new ½" thick drywall on all the walls. I hired the drywall mudding and taping to a local contractor. We also replaced the entire kitchen.

We also hired a local contractor to build a sunroom addition onto the west side of the kitchen area. My brother Brad helped me pour new concrete sidewalks to the new screened-in porch.

Both of our children were born while we lived in that house, and they grew up there until we moved to Greenville, South Carolina, in 1994.

Woodworking and Lloyd Wells

Our First Street house was only about one block away from Connie's parents, Lloyd and Marilyn Wells. It was nice having babysitters just one block away, and the kids enjoyed spending time with their grandparents.

Lloyd was an avid woodworker and had a fully equipped shop in his detached garage. I started to do woodworking projects, and I learned a lot of techniques from Lloyd. I also bought and studied many books on woodworking.

After Lloyd passed away in 2004, I learned that he did not understand how wood expands and contracts with temperature and humidity changes. Through books and magazines, I learned the common techniques to use to keep table tops from cracking or splitting.

I ended up repairing several of Lloyd's handmade items because the top had failed. I modified his design and incorporated techniques to prevent it from ever cracking again.

Biggest Mistake in My Engineering Career

Over a 30-year career, most engineers make some mistakes. Looking back at my 40-year career as an engineer, my biggest mistake occurred in 1981 at Caterpillar.

Our new manufacturing plant installed more than 12 very large steel machine coolant tanks in the ground. I was responsible for installing about four of these tanks. The standard process we used to install these coolant systems was:

1. Design the coolant system, including the tank, sluiceways, and piping system.
2. Hire a local contractor to install the tank and associated equipment.
3. Contact the coolant system tank system supplier and request that one of their Service Engineers come to Pontiac and start up the system.
4. The Service Engineer takes a day or two and gets the system properly started up.
5. The Service Engineer returns to his home office, and Caterpillar plant personnel maintain the system.

On the first tank system I installed, I followed the procedure above. Just prior to April Fool's Day, the Service Engineer came to Pontiac to start up my system. I took him to the job site and left him to do his work.

The next day, which happened to be April Fool's Day, on the way to work, I was greeted by a Senior Caterpillar Manufacturing Engineer who accused me of flooding the floor of a large part of the building! Since it was April Fool's Day, I first assumed he was "pulling my leg." Unfortunately, he was not kidding.

I investigated and found the automatic water fill system had malfunctioned during the night after the Service Engineer had gone to his hotel. A large pipe pumped the room full of excess water. We had to use tanker semi-trucks to haul the coolant to another Caterpillar facility where it could be properly disposed of. No one was injured, but we had to incur the expense of trucking the waste coolant away.

I studied the design of the system and figured out I could make it fail-safe by adding a simple mechanical float valve to the city water fill line. If the tank fill system malfunctioned, the simple mechanical float valve would prevent over-filling the system.

I fixed not only my tank but all 12 tanks in the plant. We never experienced that type of failure again during the next 25 years these systems were in service.

The 1981 Caterpillar Water Tower Story

I encountered another engineering challenge the same year my coolant system malfunctioned and flooded the plant.

To supplement the water supply from the City of Pontiac to the Caterpillar Plant, we had a 150,000-gallon water tower. This tower was built circa 1968 by the original plant site owner, Motorola. The tower needed to be painted on the inside and outside. The Caterpillar corporate logo also needed to be painted on the outside of the water tower.

The Maintenance Supervisor was instructed to take the tower out of service for a couple of months while the painting work was done. He was instructed to drain the tower to get it ready for interior painting.

The Supervisor instructed his technicians to turn off the city water supply valves and then open the valves that drained the tower.

I knew from my past work as a plumber, plus my laboratory assignments at the University of Illinois, that these large valves do not hold back 100% of the water. These valves always leak, and the leakage rate increases over time as the sliding gate inside gets rusty.

The Supervisor did not understand that these valves inherently leak. When the water tower had drained down, he instructed his technicians to close the drain valve. Over a period of a couple of weeks, the closed valve on the City Water line slowly leaked into the tower. Since the drain valve was closed, the tower began to fill with water again.

This water tower also had a boiler that heated the water in the wintertime to keep the system from freezing and breaking pipes. The boiler had been shut off and properly drained. But the leakage from the big valve filled the boiler, and it then froze and broke the boiler beyond repair.

When this problem was discovered, my boss gave me the assignment of investigating the problem and making all necessary repairs. It was difficult to perform the root cause analysis because the broken boiler had been removed and scrapped.

I knew the boiler needed to be replaced, but I did not know what capacity of boiler I needed to install since the old one had been removed. I did some research and talked to both the City of Pontiac and the Donnelly Printing Company in Dwight, which had a similar-sized water tower. I was able to determine the right size of boiler to order to replace the broken boiler.

I supervised all the repairs and the painting of the water tower. We placed it back into service, and it seemed to perform satisfactorily.

We got a stretch of very cold weather in January, with the temperature plummeting to -20F for a couple of days. The Plant Security personnel noticed the water tower was overflowing and discharging water from the side of the tower. They called me at home in Fairbury, and I immediately went to the plant to investigate.

I found the system had level control wires that hung down into the ball of the tower from the roof. Ice formed on top of the water in the tower, and the level control wires froze into this ice. As the water level dropped, the ice moved down and pulled the level control wires out of the roof, causing the malfunction.

I noticed the ice stayed broken up next to the ladder, which went down into the water chamber. The solution was to have a contractor move the wires so they hung next to the ladder. Since the ice on top was always broken up around the ladder, the tower never malfunctioned again.

First Child Born in 1982 in Fairbury

Our first child, Jacob Charles Maley, was born in the Fairbury Hospital in December of 1982.

We chose Charles as a middle name because my middle name and my dad's middle name were Charles.

Around 2010, I did our family genealogy. I discovered that my grandfather, Clarence Francis Maley, had a twin brother named Charles. These twin brothers were from Maysville, KY, and they went to basic training for World War I at what is now Fort Knox. Unfortunately, Charles Maley caught and died of the Spanish Flu. It is said we lost more soldiers to the Spanish Flu than in combat.

In honor of his dead twin brother, my grandfather named his firstborn son Clarence Charles Maley. This started the tradition of using Charles as a middle name. My son also named his son with the middle name of Charles as well.

Early Adopter of Personal Computers

I enjoyed writing FORTRAN computer programs for various Ag Engineering classes at the U of I.

My first Supervisor at Caterpillar bought a Sinclair computer to check it out. He lost interest in it and gave it to me. I figured out how to use it.

I bought some of the earliest personal computers, including the Texas Instruments TI99/4A and then a Commodore 64. I used these computers in my basement office at our 604 N. First Street house.

Commodore 64

The main use I had for these computers was to calculate the equivalent annual compounded return of the three stock mutual funds I first bought.

The computer programs I wrote used the following methodology:

1. The input data was the periodic purchases I made in the mutual funds.
2. Use the compound interest formula to determine the current value of the investment using the equivalent interest rate.
3. Use the trial & error method to hone in on the exact compound return rate. Start with a guess of 10%
4. Use the ratio method to guess at the next interest rate to try.
5. Switch to the straight line Y=MX+B formula to keep honing in on the right answer.

Each mutual fund had fewer than 100 investment transactions. If I remember correctly, it took these early computers 10 to 15 minutes to hone in on the correct answer for each mutual fund!

Today, the same calculation using the same basic methodology can be done in less than 1 second!

I was the first Manufacturing Engineer to be trained at the Pontiac plant on how to perform computer drafting. When you machine parts from steel, you start with a blank part. You then keep performing different machining operations until the desired shape is achieved.

Each one of these different machining operations requires a separate print.

CHAPTER 7

New Job Role in the Product Development and Research World at Caterpillar (1991 to 1994)

Advanced Fuel Systems at Caterpillar

In 1991, we had another major reorganization at Caterpillar. Our Product Design engineering team had its office in Mossville, not Pontiac. The company decided to form a special Advanced Fuel Systems group in Mossville. Pontiac Plant managers designated me to be the Manufacturing representative on this team. For about 2 years, I had a desk in Mossville and another in the Pontiac Plant. I did a lot of driving those years between Pontiac and Mossville!

I quickly became the Team Leader for a team developing a new fuel injector product for the Pontiac Plant to manufacture. We decided to hire a California consultant to help design the new product. I learned how to use Caterpillar's corporate lawyers to draft legal agreements with the consultant that were fair to the consultant while protecting Caterpillar's intellectual property.

After about 1 year, we learned that the consultant could no longer add value to the new product development. We mutually agreed to part ways, and Caterpillar paid the consultant a substantial sum to honor the contract and end the relationship.

During this 2-year assignment, I served as a team member on several very interesting research projects under development at our Technical Center. Some of these projects were considered to be "Top Secret," and I had to obtain special badges and clearance to enter some Tech Center facilities.

I also learned that Caterpillar had a technical report system where any engineer could submit a technical report on any subject. I started using this system and continued to write technical reports for the rest of my career at Caterpillar.

U.S. Patents

While working in the Advanced Fuel Systems Department, I learned Caterpillar's new patent system and wrote many Invention Reports, which were used to file new U.S. patent applications. I applied for and received 14 U.S. patents while I was in that department. Later, I received two more U.S. patents, bringing my total to 16. A complete list of my 16 U.S. patents is in the Appendix section of this book.

As of 2026, my son Jacob C. Maley now also has 16 patents of his own at Caterpillar. He has many more applications in the pipeline, so he will end up beating my record of 16 U.S. Patents!

1st SAE Paper

In this era, I wrote and presented my first SAE (Society of Automotive Engineers) paper. I received a notice asking engineers to write and present SAE papers at the 1993 Earthmoving Industry Conference in Peoria, Illinois. Since I had just finished a very interesting project, I offered to write a paper titled ***Rapid Development of New Product Concepts Using Teamwork.***

A couple of weeks later, my department manager came to me and told me he did not want me to write this paper. He told me that if I wanted to do a paper, I could write one about the computer modeling tools Caterpillar was using to design new products. I could have done extensive research and written a paper on these computer modeling tools, but I chose not to pursue that topic.

A couple of weeks later, a high-level Caterpillar Engineering Manager called me to ask how my paper on teamwork was coming along. I told him about my manager’s directive that I could not do the paper I wanted to do.

I suspect this manager called my department manager and "convinced" him to let me write the paper I wanted, because he came to me and told me to write it.

I had a very short deadline to write my paper due to a change in management direction. I remember going into the Pontiac Plant on

Saturday and Sunday to use their computers and plotters to write my paper. I enjoyed presenting SAE paper number 931173 at the big Civic Center in Peoria.

Fuel Injection 101 Actuator Design Guide

Before I started the 2-year assignment in the Advanced Fuel Systems department, my background was in mechanical engineering rather than electrical engineering, including magnetic circuit design. As Team Leader for the new product team, I had to heavily study the fields involved with predicting and understanding the basic physics of diesel fuel electromagnetic injectors. I also did many lab tests to validate the designs.

In that era, Caterpillar had a small specialized section that handled the electrical design of fuel injectors and the magnetic circuit design. The result of this organizational structure was that mechanical engineers responsible for normal fuel injection did not really understand how the whole system worked.

I decided to write a Fuel Injection Actuator 101 design guide so future engineers could easily understand the whole system. I wrote the guide, then asked two engineers in the special actuator section to review and update it. Once we agreed on the design guide content, I converted it to an official Caterpillar Technical Report.

About 10 years after I published this guideline, I ran into some engineers at a meeting. They thanked me for writing the design guide and said it was mandatory for new fuel injection engineers to study it when they started their jobs in that design group.

Jacob and Stacy at Marsh Park circa 1992

CHAPTER 8

Off to Greenville, South Carolina (1994 to 1995)

I was offered a promotion to transfer from Pontiac to help start up a new engine and fuel injection plant in Greenville, South Carolina.

In some ways, it was sad to leave our house at 604 North First Street in Fairbury. We had lived in this house for about 15 years, and both of our children were born and raised there. Connie and I remodeled the whole house and added a screened-in porch on the west side.

It was also very nice to have one set of grandparents living just one block away and the other set five miles away on the farm. Our kids enjoyed spending time with their grandparents. The Fairbury swimming pool was only about two blocks from our house.

Simpsonville, South Carolina

We researched the Greenville area and found that Simpsonville had the best schools, so we moved to the Neilly Farm huge subdivision. This subdivision had a community swimming pool, and it was only three miles from the new Caterpillar Greenville plant.

Starting up the Greenville Plant

The plant was about three-fourths engine machining and assembly and one-quarter diesel fuel injection machining and assembly. I was in charge of the fuel injection portion of the facility. I had four Operations Superintendents reporting to me. We successfully commissioned $27 million in manufacturing equipment, including four new fuel injection products.

I was also the backup to the Facilities Engineer due to my extensive experience in Pontiac's Plant Engineering Department.

Many sources indicate it is most difficult to move children when they are teenagers. Our two children were not yet teenagers, and

both of them adapted well to the move from Fairbury to the Greenville area.

Greenville was the second Caterpillar plant I helped start up and get into operation.

CHAPTER 9

Off to Jefferson, Georgia (1995 to 1999)

Just about the time we had the Greenville plant up and running well after one year, I was asked to help start up my 3rd new Caterpillar Plant in Jefferson, Georgia. We decided to move all the fuel injection equipment from the Greenville Plant to the new Jefferson Plant. This meant that Greenville would be solely an engine manufacturing plant. I was offered a position at the Greenville Plant, but since I had worked my entire 16-year career in the Diesel Fuel Injection area, I turned down the offer.

Again, we checked the Athens, Georgia area to find the best-rated schools for our children. We found that Watkinsville, just south of Athens, had the highest-rated schools. Living in Watkinsville meant a 45-minute drive to work each day, but we decided this was the best location to buy a house. We purchased a brand new "spec" house in a new subdivision in Watkinsville.

Jefferson Plant Organization

We set up the plant with three factory superintendents. We hired an experienced guy who was supervising a supplier's machine shop. Since we were moving all these machines to the Caterpillar Jefferson Plant, it made sense to hire the existing supervisor. These products were high-volume and required an automotive-type 7-day-a-week operation.

I was the superintendent for a portion of the machine shop that produced conventional, low-volume Caterpillar products. Another experienced Caterpillar Pontiac Superintendent was transferred to Jefferson to oversee a low-volume fuel injection assembly and test area.

I also had the responsibility for the Maintenance Department, including building maintenance.

Major Increase in Responsibility

Unfortunately, the supervisor we hired from the supplier turned out not to be a good fit for the high-volume machine shop. After about a year, the Plant Manager called me into his office and told me I had to take over the high-volume machine shop immediately. This meant I added about 100 employees to the 40 I already had, bringing the total to about 140 across the entire machine shop. The experienced Caterpillar superintendent continued to supervise his 40-employee assembly and test area. My responsibilities went from running a conventional Caterpillar, typical 5-day-a-week, low-volume operation to a high-volume, 7-day-a-week operation.

I knew from my experience that being in charge of a high-volume automotive operation usually meant the person in charge often had very high stress, leading to divorces and alcoholism. I maintained a good work-life balance while holding this job for about 2 years.

Entering the Author and Book Publishing World

Around 1998, I decided to write my first book while living in Watkinsville. Little did I know back then that this decision would eventually lead me to write 50 short financial books and over 30 local history books, and to collaborate on a new Boglehead's book!

I saw there was a writers' conference at UGA (University of Georgia). At this writer's conference, I learned that romance novels sell the most books every year. At the luncheon break, two very established women who had written best-selling romance novels for years sat at my lunch table. They speculated that romance novels sell so well because once a woman gets married, the romance period is over. Women readers find romance after they are married by reading romance novels.

Since I was pretty infamous for being the husband who bought his wife spark plugs and tires for her birthday, I knew there was never any hope of me ever being a romance novel writer!

As a conference attendee, I met with an existing agent. I happened to be assigned to talk to the agent for the singer who sang the famous

Green Beret song. He did not really have any advice for a non-fiction writer like I wanted to become.

I did some Internet searching and found a book agent who would take me as a client. I wrote up a plan for a short book about index fund investing. In 1998, there were very few books published about this topic.

Rejection Letters Roll In

The agent submitted my proposal to the "Big 7" American publishing companies. The major publishers cited two reasons for rejecting my book.

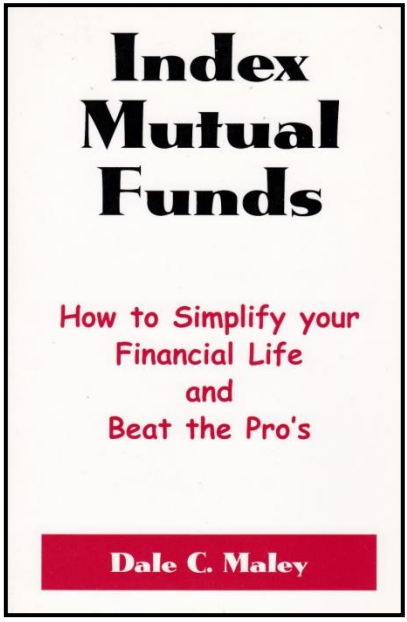
1. The publishers lumped my index fund book idea into the general field of investing books. There were hundreds of investing books, but none addressed the sub-category of index fund investing.
2. The major publishers had a minimum of 50,000 words. I intentionally kept my book under 50,000 words so readers could quickly learn the advantages of index fund investing. My goal was for the reader to finish the book in less than 1 hour.

I was not aware of the 50,000-word minimum requirement. Furthermore, I was disappointed that my agent did not alert me to this rule. I checked my agent's background and found that her experience was with fiction writers. I was the first non-fiction writer she had ever dealt with.

At this point, I was very frustrated with the conventional book publishing industry and its associated agents. I discovered a book by Dan Poynter that laid out in great detail how to publish one's own book. I decided to go this route.

Writing a Book While Running a 7-Day a Week Factory

I often took my two kids swimming after supper. I took a blank bound notebook with me and worked on my index fund book while serving as a lifeguard for my kids. It was challenging to find time to write this first book because my job often required me to work 7 days a week.



I found an Ohio publisher focused on printing books for people who want to self-publish. The more books you ordered, the lower the cost per book. I decided to order 2,000 copies to achieve the book cost I wanted. I first sold these books myself through word of mouth. Amazon also lets me sell my books on their website. It took a few years, but I sold enough books to recover my printing costs. I earned nothing for my labor hours of writing the book, but that was acceptable.

Amazon then acquired its own printing plants and offered to print my books on demand. I switched from selling books from my home inventory to relying on Amazon to print and ship them to customers.

For a couple of years, I investigated most areas of financial planning. Each time I researched a topic, I converted my findings into a short book that I sold on Amazon. I ended up publishing about 50 of these short stories on various investing topics.

Helping to Save an Employee's Life

Before I helped start up the Jefferson Plant, I took many different classes, including basic first aid, CPR, and some first-responder-type safety training. Circa 1998, I was one of two factory superintendents with seven supervisors and about 180 workers.

One day, the 2nd shift supervisor called me to the lobby at the start of 2nd shift. When I got to the lobby, I met the supervisor with one of his employees sitting in a lobby chair. The supervisor told me the employee was not feeling well, so he was about to send him home.

I noticed he was about 50 years of age. He was pale and clammy, and he told me he had some bad pains running down his arm. Based upon my experience and training, I thought it was very likely the employee had the symptoms of an impending heart attack. I immediately called for an ambulance.

The ambulance ride from Jefferson to Athens was about 40 minutes. During this trip to the Athens hospital, the employee experienced two heart attacks. The ambulance crew kept him going until they arrived at the hospital.

The employee took about 8 weeks to recover before he could come back to work. The employee thanked me for calling the ambulance that day!

Almost Moved to South Georgia

Caterpillar decided to build a new facility in Thomasville, Georgia. My Plant Manager told me I should interview for the Plant Manager position at this new facility.

I flew back to the Pontiac Plant and interviewed for this Plant Manager job. I then returned to the Jefferson Plant. A few days later, a very senior manager at the Pontiac Plant called me. He told me I did not get the job because the new plant would have a very large heat-treating department. The Pontiac Plant Metallurgist was planning the new heat-treat department for the Thomasville facility and buying millions of dollars in new equipment. The senior

manager told me that the consensus in Pontiac was that the Plant Metallurgist should become the Plant Manager at Thomasville, since he was buying all the key equipment.

I was very disappointed until the senior manager told me I was doing nothing wrong, that I had a great career, and that I should keep doing a great job. I thought it was a "nice touch" for this senior manager to give me this feedback.

When I told Connie we were not moving to South Georgia, she was very relieved. Among people living in the Athens area, South Georgia was known for being too hot and having too many snakes! In retrospect, I am glad I did not get this job. The new heat-treat equipment was plagued by equipment and process problems that the Metallurgist never solved!

Jefferson Plant Manager Retires

I wanted to take this job, but it did not work out. To make a long story short, they sent an experienced Factory Superintendent down from the Pontiac Plant to become the Jefferson Plant Manager.

When this organizational change was announced, one of my Quality Engineering friends called me from Pontiac. She had been the new Plant Manager's key support person for several years. She also had worked with me for many years at both the Pontiac and Jefferson Plants.

She told me on the phone that she knew both of us very well and predicted that, within a few months, only one of us would still be at the Jefferson Plant. She made this prediction because we had completely different management styles. It turned out she was right because I was transferred to the Pontiac Plant very shortly after that.

Enjoyed Living Just Outside Athens, Georgia

Looking back, we enjoyed living in the very nice subdivision in Watkinsville, Georgia. The kids enjoyed school, and Stacy was active in gymnastics, and Jacob played football.

Poor Stacy had to help me move 1,100 bricks from the store to our new patio!

In addition to finishing the basement on that house, I added a new brick patio with 1,100 bricks. We also added a stacked rock retaining wall and new steps to the patio. I also did quite a bit of landscaping work.

Many of the people living in our subdivision originally lived in the northern states. When some of our neighbors heard we were moving back to cold Illinois, they could not believe it. Nobody had ever heard of any northerners ever moving back north again!!

I told my neighbors I had worked for Caterpillar for 15 years, which was half the length of a typical 30-year career. If I worked 15 more years, I would receive a nice pension in retirement. I enjoyed the many different jobs I had at Caterpillar, so I still thought it would be great to work another 15 years at a company I liked.

Lost My Other Best High School Friend in 1998

I had a lot of friends in high school, but Daniel Ifft and Jeff Kilgus were probably my two best friends. Daniel Ifft died in a tragic automobile crash in Champaign in 1974. In that crash, Jeff Kilgus was badly injured, but he survived the crash.

After high school, I would continue to see Jeff from time to time. Each year, when I got my free Caterpillar calendar, I left it and a 6-pack of beer at Jeff's door. Jeff used Caterpillar equipment at his sand quarry in Fairbury.

In the summer of 1998, I was in Georgia, but I heard that Jeff had cancer and was in the hospital. Since I was planning to bring my family to Fairbury for Thanksgiving, I decided to see him then. But he died on September 13, 1998. I flew up from Georgia to attend his funeral.

Danny was only 18, and Jeff was only 42 when they died. These deaths made me realize we never know how many days we have left on this Earth!

CHAPTER 10

Back to Fairbury (1999 to 2000)

When we got the news that I was being transferred back to the Pontiac Plant, we had to decide on housing. We decided we wanted our kids to spend as much time as possible with both sets of grandparents in Fairbury. We also had a good school system in Fairbury.

We decided to build a new brick ranch in a new subdivision in the northwest corner of Fairbury. By 1999, my cousin Lynn Dameron had switched from being a plumber and electrician to being a General Contractor. I hired Lynn as the General Contractor for our new house. Lynn hired my dad to do most of the plumbing on our new house.

When Jacob got out of school in Georgia, he moved to Fairbury with me. Jacob and I were "Bachelors," and we lived at my parents' farmhouse. About every night, Jacob would get on the phone to find out which Grandma had the best supper planned, and then we would eat there! I bought an old boat for Jacob, and he spent many summer days fishing on Bressner's pit near our farm.

Connie and Stacy stayed in Georgia until our new house move-in date in August 1999. Lynn was able to get about 95% of the new house completed in about 6 months. I finished some of the odds and ends when we moved in.

Once we moved into the new house in August of 1999, I started finishing the large 2,800-square-foot basement. It took me until about March of 2000 to finish this large basement. I did all the drywall work and burned up two electric sanders because I always put too much mud on the joints. The basement turned out very nice, with my office, a spare bedroom, a TV room, a bathroom, a small kitchen, and my woodworking shop.

Back into the Design Engineering World

My new job title was Large Fuel Injector Design Supervisor. Because the fuel systems for very large diesel engines are relatively low-volume products, Caterpillar has always contracted with other companies to manufacture them.

One part of my job was to select a supplier for the latest generation of large engine fuel systems. I got to visit companies in England, West Germany, and the former East Germany. I also worked with a team that determined unit costs and capital investments.

In this assignment, I learned to work with people from several different companies and cultures.

CHAPTER 11

The Emissions Decade (2001 to 2010)

The U.S. Government developed a plan to reduce emissions from diesel engines dramatically. This resulted in new emissions standards for 2004, 2007, and 2010.

This meant that all diesel engine companies had to re-invent their products about every three years during the decade of 2000 to 2010. By the time the last major emissions law change was implemented in 2010, the diesel engine was as "environmentally clean" as was technically possible or reasonable. No major product changes were required from an emissions viewpoint after about 2010.

Before 2001, Caterpillar's diesel fuel injector business was split across three sites. Design Engineering was in Mossville, product development testing was at the Mossville Tech Center, and manufacturing was at the Pontiac Plant.

Because of the intensive product development that was going to be required, Caterpillar decided to consolidate all three functions at the Pontiac Plant.

We had to build and start up a new research and development center at the Pontiac Plant. I think because of my extensive experience starting up three Caterpillar manufacturing plants, a senior design engineer and I were assigned the following projects:

1. Design and build a new R&D testing area within the large Pontiac facility.

2. Work with Tech Center personnel to plan and then implement moving all R&D testing from the Tech Center to the new facility at Pontiac.

Hiring a Professional Con Man

My partner and I had to not only design and build a new test area in Pontiac, but we also had to hire employees to run the area. We quickly identified that we needed to hire an Instrumentation Engineer to repair and calibrate the test equipment.

In the 2001 era, the U.S. economy was booming, and it was hard to hire any engineers. We developed a job description, which was posted on various Internet job sites. We knew it was going to be very difficult to find someone for this highly specialized job.

We got a resume from a candidate, and on paper, he looked like he was qualified for the job. My team partner and I called him and asked him if he could fly from his home in Utah to Pontiac for an interview in a couple of days. He said he could do that.

At that time, Caterpillar hired a very experienced Engineering Manager who had worked at a large automotive company and John Deere. He became the boss of myself and another senior level Design Engineer.

The three of us individually interviewed the job candidate for about one hour each. Caterpillar had a standardized interview question and answer format that we used.

When I interviewed the candidate, he was very talkative, had a colorful past, but was qualified for our job. We always ask a "job fit" type question to try to figure out if the candidate will be happy in the job and work environment for a particular job. I asked the candidate, "You have a very interesting life, and you were in the British Army, worked for the International Red Cross in the Bosnia conflict, and worked for several large companies around the world. How will you be happy if you take this job and are confined to just the four walls in this fuel injector facility in the middle of the corn fields?"

I had interviewed hundreds of blue- and white-collar employees before. I expected the candidate to take a second or two to think

about how he would answer this question. It shocked me that he immediately answered my question.

He said that he and his wife had an infant child die recently, and they wanted to move closer to her family in Iowa since they appreciated family relationships more.

His answer was acceptable to me, but my gut said something was wrong because he answered the question so quickly.

The three of us who interviewed the candidate then met, and we agreed to offer him a job. The candidate accepted the job. Caterpillar would pay for his move from Utah to Pontiac.

Unbeknownst to me and my design engineer partner, the job candidate called our manager. He requested that Caterpillar pay him cash for the moving expense fee, rather than paying the moving company after the move. Our manager approved this special cash payment. In that era, Caterpillar paid $20,000 to $30,000 for a move like this.

Neither my design engineer partner nor I would have approved this special deal if we were asked about it. It did not make sense to us to give a new employee a "cash advance" before they had even worked one day on the job.

The candidate did not show up for work on the first Monday he was supposed to start the job. The candidate did call our manager ahead of time and said he had issues, but would be reporting for work the next Monday.

The next Monday came, and he did not show up for work, and he did not call our manager. Our manager tried calling him, but the number was no longer in service. Our manager started to panic because he paid a cash advance of roughly $25,000, and it looked like the worker ran away with the money.

Further investigation showed the job candidate talked a Ford dealer in Utah into letting him drive a new car off their lot with

no cash down because he had this new job at Caterpillar. The dealer could not find the guy either.

The candidate drove his family from Utah to Florida in the new car. After arriving in Florida, he told his Iowa-born wife that he had to go help in New York City after the 9/11 incident because of his previous Red Cross experience in Bosnia. His wife finally lost patience with him and called the FBI. They tracked him down in New York City, where he was stealing money intended for victims of 9/11.

So it turned out he was an international professional con man. There was a waiting line to prosecute him for past crimes.

1. Interpol wanted him for several international incidents. He committed fraud-related crimes in Germany, Australia, and New Zealand.
2. State of Utah for stealing the new Ford car.
3. State of Colorado for a swindling incident.
4. State of New York for stealing money from 9/11 victims
5. State of Illinois for stealing the moving advance from Caterpillar

Caterpillar gave up ever trying to get their $25,000 back. The job candidate was convicted of another crime and sent to prison. Our manager was humiliated by upper management for being so gullible and losing $25,000 of company funds. He ended up only working for Caterpillar for about two years before he quit the job.

This was the first and last professional con man I ever interviewed and hired. My gut knew something was wrong with him, but I could not identify a specific item that would disqualify him. There is an old saying, “If you have never made a hiring mistake, then you have never hired anyone!”

Two Extremely Difficult Problems to Solve

Because of some studies I had done, I knew we faced two very difficult problems that we must overcome if we were going to invent all of these new products and take them to production.

1. We need to specify and build more R&D and production test equipment than we have ever built in our 70-year company history. We only had a couple of different suppliers, and they did not have the capacity to build all of these machines.
2. The computer control system for our production assembly systems had been a chronic issue for the past 10 years. We had purchased systems from about 10 different companies, and they all had different computer architectures. Many of the systems went obsolete and were very difficult to keep running. Several of the companies went out of business.

Lack of Standard Specification for Computer Architecture

I was asked to make a study to determine how to fix our chronic problem with the computer architecture for assembly systems. I found the following.

1. Caterpillar had not developed a standard specification for computer architecture. We let each assembly system supplier use any computer architecture they wanted, including hardware and software.
2. Historically, no department accepted responsibility for the computer architecture. The Manufacturing Engineer buying the system had no expertise in computer architecture. If he asked the computer department for help, they said they only worked on office PC systems and did not get involved with factory systems.

It turned out that many of the problems we had with test machines were also related to having no good standard specifications for this equipment.

How to Create Good Specifications?

I decided to figure out how we could create much better specifications for our systems. I did an Internet search, and discovered the book ***Customer-Centered Products: Creating Successful Products Through Smart Requirements Management*** by Ivy F. Hooks, published around 2001.

Ivy Hooks (1941-2026) cited studies showing that projects that invested time and money in developing clear requirements and specifications were much more likely to meet their cost and schedule goals. One of the lessons I took away from her work was that spending a small percentage of a project's budget defining what the customer actually wanted could save much larger amounts of money later during design, testing, and manufacturing.

The other key suggestion she made was that every specification should have a rationale for why that spec was needed and also a way to assure the specification was met.

Ivy Hooks Seminar near San Antonio, Texas

One of my engineers and I attended one of her three-day training conferences north of San Antonio. Ivy Hooks was the instructor, and she did a great job of explaining her idea of how good specifications should be written. I later sent some of my engineering employees to this same seminar.

New Computer Architecture Specification

I set up a multi-functional team including Caterpillar personnel from the computer department, Manufacturing Engineering, Assembly Operations, Maintenance, and Plant Engineering. I also included our new assembly system supplier and a representative from the Allen-Bradley controls manufacturer.

We rented a room at the Pontiac Elks club, and over about a three-day period, we developed a new Computer Architecture specification using the Ivy Hooks methodology.

We then used this same specification for the next 10 or 15 assembly systems we purchased. We did have some Allen-Bradley new product problems on the first system we used this specification for, but we got that solved. In general, we had almost no problems using and maintaining these systems for 20 years after they were implemented.

How to Train New Test Machine Suppliers?

Our existing suppliers only had about 20% of the capacity we needed to build all the new test machines we needed. We had tried adding some new suppliers in the past decade, but we were not successful. We likely caused a few companies to go bankrupt trying to build these complicated and very sophisticated machines. They ranged in cost from $500,000 to $1 million each and typically took 12 months to build.

I thought about it and decided the Ivy Hooks specification methodology would apply to either R&D or production test machines. I decided to involve a larger company with us as we wrote the new specification. We met many times at their facility in Greenville, South Carolina, as we jointly developed the specification. It also taught key personnel at this new company about our testing equipment.

We then modified this basic production test machine specification so it could be used on R&D test equipment. I still remember when we used the new specification for the first time on a piece of R&D test equipment. I was checking on the project status on the shop floor of the supplier in Morton, Illinois. One of the key workers building our machines called me over to the machine. He was holding a written copy of our new specification. He thanked me profusely for developing this new spec because he really enjoyed understanding why we asked for the things that we did on a system.

I don't remember for sure, but I think we built somewhere around 50 new production and R&D test machines using the Ivy Hooks type specification. The machines were all procured in time so we could meet all the key dates for introducing all the new products in that era.

The Patent Lawsuit Trials

Back in the 1991 to 1993 era, I was the Caterpillar team leader for developing a new fuel injection product. Initially, we hired a California inventor to help with the product development project. We later mutually agreed to part company, and we paid a substantial amount of cash to terminate the relationship per the legal agreements.

About 10 years after we had quit working with the California inventor, Caterpillar filed a lawsuit against his company for various charges, including theft of intellectual property.

To prepare for the patent lawsuit trial to be held in the Federal Courthouse in downtown Peoria, I had to make many trips to our outside legal firm in Washington DC. When I was the team leader for the original project, I wrote quite a few of the Caterpillar Technical Reports documenting this project. I had to review these old reports because they became the key evidence in the patent lawsuit trial.

I was deposed for two days in Peoria before the Trial. Since Fairbury is about 60 miles from Peoria, I decided to stay overnight at the Holiday Inn in Peoria for this deposition.

The attorney on the other side, who was questioning me in the deposition, was extremely arrogant and aggressive. I answered one question he asked me, but he did not like my answer. He said I could be sent to federal prison. He asked the question a 2nd time, and I answered the same way. He got even madder at me at this point.

It was a very long first day for me with all the intense questioning. I remember calling my wife Connie from the hotel

after supper. She asked how the 1st day of the deposition went. I answered, "Other than being called a liar, a bum, a thief, and being threatened to be thrown in federal prison three times, it was a wonderful day!"

Renting Two Floors at the Downtown Old Peoria Bank for the Trial

The first Trial was 5 weeks long. We had about a dozen people involved on our side, including internal and external lawyers, support staff, and key witnesses. Caterpillar decided it would be cost-efficient to rent two floors at an old downtown Peoria hotel for the duration of the Trial.

To save money on meal expenses, they hired a chef to prepare us three meals a day at the hotel. Federal court always takes a pretty long lunch break, so we would walk back to the hotel, eat our lunch, visit, and then walk back to the courthouse.

I was designated to be Caterpillar's sole corporate representative at the Trial. I had to be in court every day of the 5-week Trial. I also testified for about two days on the stand.

I don't know for sure, but I am guessing each side spent about $10 million from the start of the lawsuit through the first Trial. Each side had to hire very expensive expert witnesses.

I enjoyed visiting with our expert witnesses at lunch breaks or after supper. At that time, I was reading a book about the NSA (National Security Agency). In that book, they said that patents are issued in secret to military contractors who develop new weapons. Once a month, a handful of people would meet in a top-secret room and decide what patents to issue. They must remain top-secret patents to prevent enemies from obtaining our technology. One of the participants is the head of the U.S. Patent Office.

About that time, our expert witness was getting ready to testify in court. He was a former head of the U.S. Patent Office. I decided

to ask him if the story in the book about the secret monthly meetings was a true story.

He replied to my question and said yes, the story in the book was true. He attended the monthly meetings, but he could not even tell his wife about the secret technology he saw.

But, a few years later, when this technology was exhibited on camera as part of Desert Storm, he did comment to his wife that some of the stuff he had seen in the 1980s really did work well!

Won the Big Patent Lawsuit Case

Caterpillar won the lawsuit. But we knew that regardless of the verdict, the losing side would try to appeal the case. We had to wait to see what happened in the appeals process.

2004 Was My Toughest Year at Caterpillar

The same year we had the big patent lawsuit trial, we were introducing many new products at both the Pontiac and Jefferson Plants. We had all the usual problems you face when starting up new products.

I remember that I worked all 31 days in July 2004. About four other key technical support people worked with me every day of that month to keep production shipments on time. That was the only time in my Caterpillar career that I worked 31 days in a row.

I got a very good performance rating for that year because we were successful in introducing the most new products in our history. But, because of the intense pressure on your personal life when you are working that many hours, I did not want to do that again!

Quoted in a Trade Magazine

The only time in my career I was interviewed by a trade magazine was in a 2004 Mechanical Engineering magazine article about diesel fuel injection equipment for Caterpillar's ACERT (TM) engines. The reporter was very professional and did a great job on the article.

Biggest Presentation in My Career

In the 2000 to 2010 era, we had an annual competition called the Caterpillar AQI (Annual Quality Improvement) award. Teams from Caterpillar units around the world competed to win this prestigious award.

The Top 5 contestants get to make a short presentation about their project to the Executive Office of Caterpillar. In 2006, the Executive Office had a CEO, about 4 group presidents, and maybe 19 vice-presidents. The final presentations were done at the corporate office in Peoria with about 100 total people in the audience.

For the 2006 competition, I submitted a project about how we searched the world for the new technology we needed to make some of the new 2004 products we introduced. I used my engineering experience and ability to write technical reports to submit our application. We did not win 1st place, but we did get to the Top 5 category.

All five winning teams had to practice their presentations three different times before the final presentation with the executives.

I like presenting projects, so I did not have any trouble presenting our project to the important group of executives. After my talk, I only had a couple of questions, and except for one question, I answered them easily. A French Vice-President asked me a tough question, but I could not understand his question and had to ask him to repeat the question. He repeated the question, and then I answered it successfully.

We then had a lunch break and got to eat with the executives. Another VP I did not know came up to me during this break and said, “Dale, don’t worry, we can’t understand the French VP most of the time either!”

Receiving an AQI award from Caterpillar CEO Jim Owens

I ended up writing the applications for three of the annual AQI awards. Two of the three applications got us to the prestigious Top 5 group.

Becoming an Illinois Registered Financial Advisor

I have always been interested in investment topics. To learn more about various areas of investing, I researched a particular topic and then turned it into a short financial book that I sell on Amazon.com. I read over 200 different books about investing as a hobby.

By the time I ran out of new topics, I had written over 30 short investing books!

I decided to legally become a registered financial advisor because in retirement, I might want to open a part-time business where I offer financial planning to customers.

I bought a book and a CD with practice test questions for the Series 65 exam. You could keep taking the test at home until you got a high enough score to pass the real test.

As an engineer, I assumed that 80% of the exam questions would be financial-type questions using numbers. Only 20% would be legal questions.

Boy, was I wrong! It turned out that about 90% of the exam questions were legal questions and only 10% involved any numbers at all. This is because of past issues with financial advisors committing fraud, losing clients' money, and stealing from clients.

High Security and Faulty Calculators

I drove from Fairbury to an office building in Peoria for the Series 65 exam. I had to put all my personal items, including my truck keys, in a locker. I was also fingerprinted. That was the first time I had ever been fingerprinted.

I was escorted into a key pad-controlled test room and issued a calculator. If I needed to go to the bathroom during the exam, I had to raise my hand and be escorted back and forth to the restroom.

I was so excited to finally get a math question instead of the boring legal questions. Back at the U of I in engineering classes, I was always taught to do a second quick sanity check to make sure my answer was in the "ballpark." When I did this cross-check, I discovered the calculator they issued me was faulty. I raised my hand and asked for a new calculator. The person administering the test was not surprised that the calculator was broken. I'm guessing this happened all the time.

If I had not caught this faulty calculator, I might have missed every math question on the exam! The good news is I passed the Series 65 exam!

After I got back home to Fairbury, I wondered why such tight security with fingerprinting and keypad-restricted access with escorts was necessary?

I checked on the Internet and found that three New York City stockbrokers hired people to take their exams for them, and they got caught! That is why the higher security was instituted.

Next, I had to complete the process of registering with the state of Illinois Securities Department. It was slightly painful, but not too bad.

Further research found that most Financial Planners buy E&O (Errors & Omissions) insurance, and in 2006, that had an annual cost of $12,000 to $20,000 per year.

Over the next few years, I only did financial planning for about three non-family members. Those customers were all happy with my work. I never did buy ay E&O insurance policy.

I have done financial planning for about five family members for over 20 years now. I typically invest only in Vanguard stock and bond index funds with a 60:40 stock-to-bond ratio.

I never seriously pursued being a financial planner after retirement from Caterpillar. I chose to do other things like community volunteer work, write history books, do woodworking projects, do stained glass projects, and spend time with my grandchildren.

Lost 1st Patent Lawsuit on Appeal but Won the 2nd Trial

Caterpillar won the first Trial but lost on appeal because of a jury selection issue. Circa 2006, we did the whole 5-week Trial over again. We won this 2nd Trial also.

By this time, the vice-presidents at Caterpillar and the other side had both moved on from their jobs. Their replacements looked at the history of this case and asked, “Why are we spending millions in legal fees on this case?”

I’m going to paraphrase, but both companies issued a press release saying both companies “had kissed and made up”. They were dropping all lawsuits and would jointly do some increased business between the two companies!

Political Correctness Gone Wild

In 2007, the Illinois Chief mascot did his last halftime performance at a U of I football game. Because of "Political Correctness", the U of I dropped the Chief.

Until 2007, I annually contributed some money to both the U of I and ISU. After 2007, I continued to annually donate money to ISU, but I refused to donate money to the U of I.

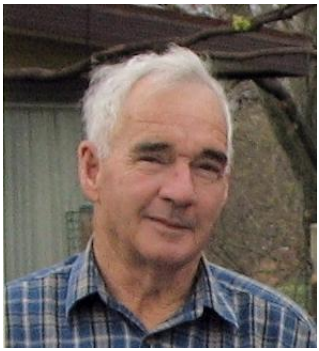
Each time I got a phone call from a U of I fundraiser, I told them that as soon as you put the Chief back, I will start contributing money again.

As a historian, I think it is important for students to realize that Native Americans were stewards of Illinois for about 10,000 years before any white settlers arrived. I thought the Chief was done very respectfully and very tastefully. Without the Chief, students at the U of I today don't even realize Native Americans lived here for 10,000 years!

Tragedy Strikes in 2008 and 2009

In 2008, my nephew, Brian Munz, was killed in the line of duty as a volunteer fireman. He was only 24 years old. The whole family was very sad about Brian's death.

In 2009, my dad, Clarence Charles Maley, passed away after a short bout with colon cancer. He was 75 years old.



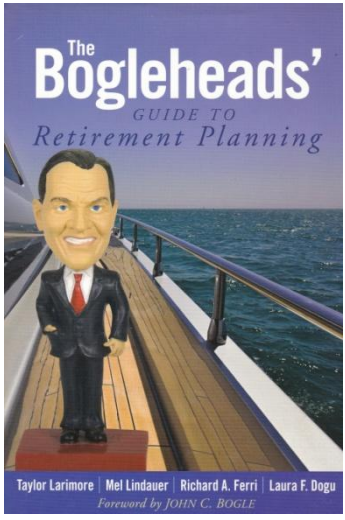
I still miss being able to talk to my dad about things in life. He was a great teacher, father, and grandfather. He was buried in the Avoca Cemetery.

Boglehead's Collaborating Book Author

John Bogle was a pioneer in making index funds available at a low cost to the general public. I studied his life in great detail and read several of his books. I also read and posted on the Bogleheads website for many years.

In 2008, a group of Bogleheads decided to collaborate and write the second Bogleheads book. This group decided to write the book chapters using the relatively new Google Docs program. Authors could work on the same chapter and update it in the Cloud. Another financial planner and I jointly wrote one chapter about financial planning.

The 8th Annual Bogleheads' convention was held in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2009. Connie and I traveled to this convention in Fort Worth. The new book was released at the convention, and all the book's authors were present. Each of the authors was honored for contributing to the book. I enjoyed this convention. It was nice having people asking me to sign their copy of the book!


The
Bogleheads'
GUIDE TO
Retirement Planning
Taylor Larimore | Mel Lindauer | Richard A. Ferri | Laura F. Dogu
Foreword by JOHN C. BOGLE

1st YouTube Video

Starting in the late 1990s, I maintained a website with hundreds of my woodworking projects. Unfortunately, around 2009, the free hosting company went out of business, and I lost the website. At the time, I did not know how to create my own website.

I decided to switch gears and start putting my projects on YouTube. I made my first YouTube video in 2009. Little did I know that by 2026, I would make 294 YouTube videos and have 2,000 subscribers to my channel! I still have not been paid one cent by YouTube, but I am very close to receiving my first royalty payment.

Web Master

A few years after this, I was "volunteered" to be the representative for the Livingston County Historical Society on a website creation project. A large non-profit group traveled around the country and in one weekend would create websites for around 50 small non-profit groups.

This group got a new website created for the Historical Society. The website is hosted by GoDaddy and uses WordPress and BeaverBuilder software.

I learned how to modify this website and make periodic updates.

Then, our Fairbury Echoes Museum lost its website host. I duplicated the Historical Society website and modified it for the museum.

As of 2026, I manage both of these websites.

Big Vacations

After the kids were on their own, Connie and I took a series of "big vacations" between 2005 and 2017.

2005	Door County, Wisconsin
2005	Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks, Las Vegas
2006	Biltmore Mansion, Callaway Gardens, Roosevelt's Little White House
2007	Grand Coulee Dam, Crater Lake, Redwoods, Curly's Redwood Lodge, San Francisco, Alcatraz
2008	Washington DC, Virginia, three presidential houses
2009	Texas, Bogleheads' Convention
2010	Indiana Covered Bridge Festival, Turkey Run State Park
2011	Green Briar Resort Hotel with secret nuclear bomb shelter
2012	Kokomo Stained Glass factory, Henry Ford Museum/Village, Saugatuck MI.
2013	Stacy Florida wedding, London, Jacob Ireland wedding
2014	Genealogy vacation with two cemeteries and Maysville, KY
2015	Galena, Shipshewana
2016	Yosemite, Sequoia, Las Vegas
2017	The Pickers at Le Claire, Iowa

Vacation Planning

For our big vacations, I did the vacation planning schedule and chose which hotels to stay in. I tried to choose historical or unique hotels instead of the modern chain hotels.

In general, my vacation plans worked out fairly well. For example, we stayed in a former brothel in Kalispell, Montana, after spending the day in Glacier National Park. This hotel was unique and very nice to stay in.

Curley’s Redwood Lodge in Crescent City, California

Connie would agree I did pretty well on my vacation planning, with the exception of Curly's Redwood Lodge. I found this place on the Internet, and it intrigued me because the entire hotel was built from one massive redwood tree. On their website, the hotel really looked very interesting.

Curly
REDWOOD
LODGE
CRESCENT CITY, CALIFORNIA
Where the Redwoods Meet the Sea!
The Curly Redwood Lodge is one of northern California's most unique lodges. It was built from one curly redwood tree that produced 57,000 board feet of lumber. Curly redwood is unique because of the curly grain of the wood, unlike typical straight grained redwood.
We are 5 minutes away from the Redwood National and State Parks; right across the street from our lovely harbor and beaches. After a day of hiking the redwood forests or walking our pristine beaches you can relax at the lodge and watch the beautiful sunsets over the harbor and smell the fresh ocean air. What a storybook ending to a perfect day!

When we arrived and checked in, we were extremely disappointed. The rooms had not been updated since the 1950s, and Connie was afraid to take a shower because it was likely that there were some bugs in the shower. Connie told me, "Gee, just look across the street, we could have stayed in a nice Holiday Inn!"

Almost 20 years after this, Connie still brings up the Curly’s Lodge incident!

You Are Not Driving the Rental Car through the Hole in the Redwood!

On the same vacation in 2007, we loved seeing the redwood trees in Northern California. At some point, I saw where we could drive our car through a tunnel cut through the trunk of a giant redwood. This tree has been in many old movies.

I was all ready to drive our rental car through the tree, but Connie told me not to do it because the car might get stuck in the tree!! I gave in and did not try to drive through the tree.

You Are Not Driving the Rental Car on the Beach!

On our 2007 vacation to Texas, we found Padre Island, and it had a sort of road which really was just the sand on the beach for the Gulf of Mexico.

I always thought it was neat to watch people drive their vehicles on the beach sand in TV shows and movies. Connie told me not to drive on the beach because we would probably get stuck.

Although I heeded her advice about not driving through the tunnel in the redwood tree, this time I did not follow her advice! I drove a little ways on the beach, only a few feet away from the ocean. It was great, and we did not get stuck in the sand!

Financial Planning Conferences in Chicago

For three years in a row, 2006-2008, I attended this conference for financial planners in a large downtown Chicago hotel on the Chicago River. I figured out a pretty neat way to attend these conferences without staying at the very expensive downtown hotel.

1. Drive from Fairbury and check into a hotel near Midway Airport. For a daily fee, I could leave my F150 truck in their parking lot.
2. Take the hotel shuttle to Midway Airport nearby.
3. Take the "El Train" public transportation from Midway to downtown Chicago.
4. Walk about 10 blocks to the hotel.
5.

Each day of the three-day conference, speakers would talk on a topic for about one hour. There were short breaks between speakers. Although the speakers were interesting, I usually learned more by talking to fellow financial planners during the breaks.

I think we took a one-hour lunch break. It would have been challenging to find a nearby restaurant and eat lunch with just a 60-minute break.

You could go to rooms in the basement of the hotel and get a free box lunch. The only catch was that you were captive to a speaker from the firm that paid for the box lunches.

One of these speakers proposed the following scheme to beat the stock market.

1. The entire stock market can be divided into about 12 different industry segments.
2. The stock market cycles from boom to bust and back to boom again. Each of the 12 different segments reacts at different times in these cycles.

3. If you follow his timing advice, you buy and sell the segments at the right time to beat the overall stock market returns.

I already knew from my previous studies of index funds that his theory was “absolute baloney”, but hey, the box lunch meal was pretty tasty!

As I walked out of this basement box lunch meeting, other attendees said to me, "Boy, can that guy talk up a storm". Another attendee said, “If he has figured out how to beat the stock market, why doesn’t he get rich following his own advice so he does not have to give box lunch talks in the basement of a hotel?”

Unfortunately, they moved this conference meeting from Chicago to Florida, so I quit going when that happened.

Lisa, Brad, Marjorie, Karen, and Dale in 2012, about the time we had the estate sale at the farm.

CHAPTER 12

The Family Grows (2011 to 2014)

Marjorie Maley Moves to Town in 2013

After my dad died, my mother spent three winters in the old farmhouse. She decided it was time to move into town. She found a nice brick ranch home on Willow and First Streets in Fairbury.

I helped remodel her new house. I upgraded two bathrooms and fixed electrical wiring issues caused by incompetent local electricians.

Since our family had lived in the old farmhouse for five generations since it was built in 1905, it took many weekends to empty the house and the machine shed.

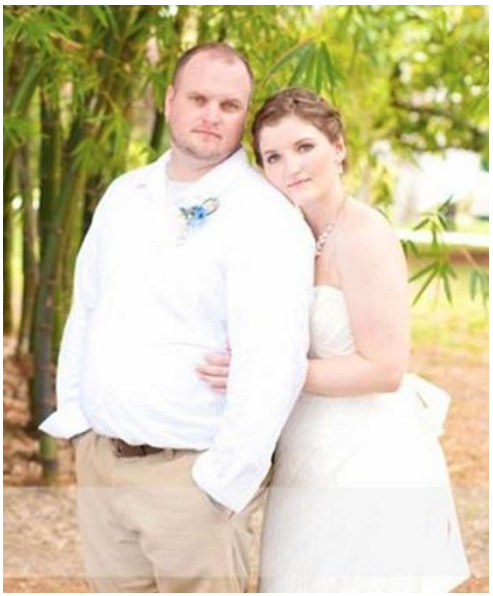
We then held an estate sale. It took about two years, but we sold the old farmhouse to a new owner.

I ended up with most of the family material from the five generations. This prompted me to learn how to research family genealogy. I traced our ancestors back to their European country of origin. I wrote five scrapbooks with our family history using Shutterfly.com. I then provided copies to my siblings, children, and cousins. Four of these cover the Maley side of the family, and one covers the Dameron side.

Once I had this research done, I was asked to post various historical information on the Fairbury Facebook history page. Eventually, I became the main poster on this page and am now a co-administrator.

I am also co-administrator for the Livingston County history Facebook page with Pam Haag Geyer.

1st Child Gets Married



Our daughter, Stacy Ann Maley, married Steven Pecharich on June 1, 2013. They got married in a beautiful garden ceremony at the Edison-Ford Winter Estate in Fort Myers, Fla. I was very proud to walk her down the aisle and give her away.

Marilyn Wells, the bride's grandmother, age 89, went deep-sea fishing with many of the men in the wedding party. Marilyn caught more fish than any of the much younger men!

2nd Child Also Gets Married in 2013

Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Maley

Jacob Charles Maley married Nicole Miller on August 19, 2013, at Newtown Castle in Ireland.

When Connie and I were planning this European trip, we had to decide in which order to visit London and Ireland. We chose to spend a week in London first, then travel to Ireland for the wedding. In retrospect, we picked the right order because London was all hustle and bustle. We were ready for the laid-back atmosphere of Western Ireland, which is rural and quiet.

Jacob Maley, Marilyn Wells, and Stacy Maley in 2005 in Fairbury.

CHAPTER 13

Last Year at Caterpillar (2015)

1st Grandchild Born

Our first grandchild, Caleb Charles Maley, was born in July of 2015. Connie forgot to tell me that one of her retirement goals was to help care for her grandchildren!

We quickly decided to buy a condo in Washington at 1115 Breeze Way Street. This location was roughly halfway between Jacob's house in Germantown Hills and Stacy's house in Congerville. Connie stayed in the condo during the week and came home to Fairbury on weekends.

Surprise Early Retirement Offer

In the summer of 2015, I was thinking that I would be 60 years old on December 1, 2015. I thought I would work for about one more year before retiring.

During my 37-year career at Caterpillar, we would have a downturn about every two years. The downtown would last one to two years. Caterpillar has always been a very cyclical company.

But the downturn in 2015 turned out to be the longest in my time at Caterpillar. It lasted almost five years.

Because of this severe downturn, Caterpillar offered an early retirement package, which I qualified for. I was one of the first ones to sign up for this early retirement package!

Last Few Weeks a Surreal Experience

I remember the best word I could think of to describe my last few weeks at Caterpillar was 'surreal'. If you have worked somewhere for 37 years, it is kind of frightening to think, "Boy, I will no longer be getting up and going to work every day. What will I be doing?"

My official last workday was December 21, 2015, because I had unused vacation days. They had a very nice retirement program, and Connie and my children attended. Even my infant grandson Caleb made it to the program!

37 Year Career in Retrospect

I like learning new things and developing new products and processes. The 1980 to 2015 era was a “perfect” one for my career. Before 1980, very little innovation was needed. But then we had to re-invent our products and processes about every three years because of changing U.S. emissions laws. The last major change to emissions laws was in 2012, so very little innovation has occurred since then.

CHAPTER 14

Retirement Begins (2016 to 2020)

In late 2015, two Fairbury aldermen formed the Fairbury Improvement Group. One of these aldermen insisted I join the group because of my extensive knowledge of Fairbury's history. I agreed to join the group.

This group existed from 2015 until COVID hit in 2020. In 2026, I wrote up an article about the history and accomplishments of this group. A copy of this article is shown below.

10th Anniversary of Fairbury Improvement Group Projects

By: Dale C. Maley

Throughout Fairbury's long history, the community has always been known for its citizens working together to improve their town. From building parks to organizing fairs and community events, volunteer efforts have always played an important role in shaping the city's character. One of the most recent examples of this tradition occurred just ten years ago with the formation of the Fairbury Improvement Group.

The Fairbury Improvement Group was formed in 2015 by two Fairbury Aldermen, Terry Zimmerman and David Slagel. Their idea was simple but important. They believed a small group of volunteers could help improve the quality of life for current residents while also helping Fairbury remain an attractive place for visitors. The group’s mission was clearly defined: to improve the quality of life for current residents, maintain the population level, and attract more visitors to shop, dine, and enjoy Fairbury’s recreational activities.

Like many community efforts, the project started with ideas and planning. In 2016, a detailed marketing and improvement plan was developed outlining short- and long-term projects to strengthen the community. The plan examined Fairbury's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to attract visitors and encourage local activities.

The Improvement Group also believed it was important to hear directly from Fairbury citizens. A town-wide survey was conducted to gather ideas for improving the community. Over 200 people responded with suggestions and ideas. These comments helped guide the group in deciding which projects to tackle first.

During the early months, the group consisted of a small number of volunteers, usually between six and twenty people depending on the time of year. The group began meeting regularly and started developing a list of projects that could realistically be accomplished with volunteer labor and financial assistance from local organizations such as the Prairie Lands Foundation.

One of the first major projects undertaken by the group was the construction of five historic murals in Veterans Memorial Park in 2016. These murals were designed to highlight important parts of Fairbury's history and to help visitors better understand the community.

The five murals featured topics that helped define Fairbury's past. One mural showed the railroad that founded the city in 1857. Another depicted the coal mining industry that once made Fairbury a boom town with several operating mines. A third mural honored Francis Townsend, Fairbury's most nationally known citizen and an early advocate for what later became the Social Security system. The fourth mural highlighted the long history of the Fairbury Fair and racetrack. The final mural represented agriculture through the story of John Virgin and his famous Percheron horse breeding operation.

These murals were installed on large wooden display panels in the park and were designed so visitors could walk along a sidewalk and read historical information about each topic. Volunteers created the high-resolution artwork, constructed the wooden frames, and installed the displays. Prairie Lands Foundation covered the material costs, while volunteers provided the labor.

The murals quickly became a popular attraction. Many local residents and their children stopped to read the displays, and visitors traveling through Fairbury often paused to learn about the town's history.

Another major improvement project involved restoring several historic advertising signs on buildings in the downtown area. Over the years, many old painted “ghost signs” had faded on the sides of buildings along Main Street. The Improvement Group believed restoring these signs would add historic charm to downtown Fairbury.

One of the largest projects was the restoration of the Occident Flour sign. This sign measured approximately sixty-eight feet wide and eighteen feet high and originally advertised “Occident Flour – Makes Better Bread.” The sign likely dated from the period between 1920 and 1934 and had faded badly over the years. Volunteers carefully recreated the missing letters and repainted the entire sign, a project that required about one hundred hours of labor.

Another historic sign restored by the group was the Swing & Steidinger Agricultural Rooms sign. This business operated in Fairbury during the early 1890s, and the original painted sign dated from about 1891. The lettering had largely disappeared over the decades, but volunteers recreated the missing words by carefully studying the faint outlines that had remained on the brick wall.

The third sign restoration project involved the old Archer House building sign. This historic hotel building dated back to 1882 and later became known as the Sherman Hotel. By studying the remaining ghost lettering on the brick wall and researching historic photographs, volunteers recreated the original Archer House lettering in the Clarendon font common during that era.

While these sign restoration projects improved downtown Fairbury's appearance, the Improvement Group soon tackled its most ambitious project.

In 2017, the group began work on the complete renovation of Marsh Park. This historic park had slowly deteriorated over many years and was at risk of closure if improvements were not made. The Improvement Group decided to undertake a full refurbishment of the park.

This renovation project required a major cooperative effort between volunteers, the City of Fairbury, and the Prairie Lands Foundation. Over seventeen weeks, more than 25 volunteers contributed approximately 2,000 hours of labor to complete the project.

The improvements to Marsh Park were extensive. A new twenty-two-foot-diameter gazebo was built as the centerpiece of the park. The north pavilion was converted into a screened-in pavilion. The 114-year-old restroom building was renovated. Over 1,100 feet of curved sidewalks were installed, creating attractive walking paths throughout the park. Playground equipment was consolidated into one area with new wood mulch. New benches and lighting were installed, and the park buildings were repainted.

When the project was completed, the park looked entirely different.

In July of 2018, approximately 300 people attended a dedication ceremony celebrating the renovation of Marsh Park. The event included live music, exhibits, and community activities. The project demonstrated what could be accomplished when local citizens worked together for the benefit of their town.

Over the next couple of years, the Fairbury Improvement Group continued completing smaller projects throughout the community. These included replacing fences, refurbishing gazebos, installing playground equipment, and developing additional historic displays and community events.

By early 2020, however, circumstances began to change. The COVID-19 pandemic arrived in March of that year and made it difficult for volunteer groups to meet and continue projects. By that time, the Fairbury Improvement Group had already completed most of the goals originally outlined when the group was formed.

With the major projects finished and the pandemic making regular meetings difficult, the group eventually disbanded.

Even though the organization only operated for a few years, its accomplishments were significant. The historic murals, restored

building signs, and the renovation of Marsh Park are improvements that citizens and visitors continue to enjoy today.

The success of these projects has also inspired other communities. The idea of using historic murals to highlight local history has since been copied in nearby towns such as Colfax in McLean County and Sibley in Ford County.

The Fairbury Improvement Group demonstrated once again an important lesson that has repeated itself many times throughout Fairbury's history. When citizens work together with a shared vision, even a small group of volunteers can accomplish projects that benefit an entire community.

Ten years later, the results of those efforts are still visible across Fairbury, and they will likely continue to be appreciated for many decades to come.

Stained Glass Classes

In the spring of 2016, I enrolled in the first of three adult education classes to learn stained glass. This class was taught by a stained glass artist and shop owner in Normal, Illinois.

For each of the three classes, we met weekly for six weeks. Each night class was three hours long. The introductory class had a total of 18 hours of attendance. If you took all three classes, you had a total of 54 hours of classroom instruction. Our instructor had over 40 years of experience as a stained glass artist, teaching classes, creating new panels, and repairing existing ones.

When I took this class, I had been doing hobby woodworking for over 30 years. At a high level, stained glass is similar to woodworking in that you start with pieces and assemble them into an assembly.

In woodworking, you never want to cut a board short, because there is no such thing as a "board stretcher." If you cut it too long, you can take just a little off until it fits.

In stained glass, you mark out the size of the piece of glass you want using a white marking pen. You then cut out the piece using a hand-held glass cutter. My tendency, learned from woodworking, was to cut the glass just a little oversize. This meant in class I was always the last one to finish my panel because I had to grind down my oversized pieces.

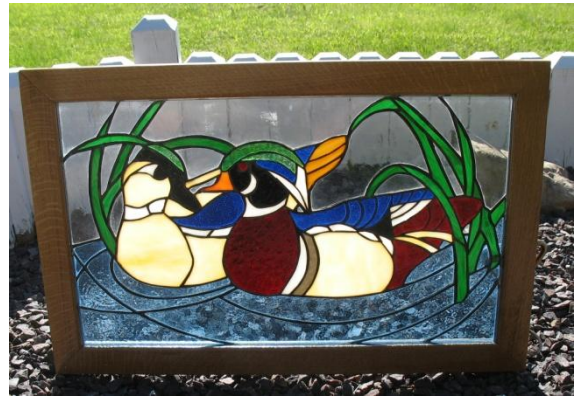
A young woman in my class would always be faster in completing a stained glass panel than I was. I then watched her carefully, and she actually cut her pieces "on the small side," so very little grinding was required. This works in stained glass because you fill any gaps with solder.

In our 3rd and final class, we had to make a stained glass panel with over 100 pieces of glass. The instructor had to pre-approve your project design.

Most stained-glass hobby work involves making flat panels. But you can make three-dimensional objects as well. I found a neat rectangular clock pattern and wanted to use it for my final project.

My instructor rejected my idea. I am not sure why. I then showed him an oval panel of two wood ducks. He said I could not make an oval shape because the hangers always loosen and they crash to the floor. He let me do the wood ducks if I would convert the oval border to a rectangular one with a wood frame, which I did.

The old instructor was set in his ways and stubborn. I am a little stubborn, also, so I went ahead and made the rectangular clock. It turned out to be gorgeous!



I did the rectangular wood duck panel, and it turned out very well also.

My instructor retired and closed his shop about two years after I took his classes. He had taught over 1,000 people the stained glass hobby over his 40 years.

I have continued the hobby and try to do one new project each year.

Called Back to Caterpillar after Retirement

In 2017, the company called back about 15 of us to return to work. I was called back to work three times.

When COVID hit in March of 2020, my wife forbade me from going into the Plant in Pontiac because she thought I might catch the virus, give it to her, and then she would give it to our grandchildren she was babysitting. So little was known about this virus in March of 2020 that I had to agree she had a valid point. I completely finished working at the Pontiac Plant in March of 2020.

I was told that before Obamacare in 2010, if a retiree was called back to work, they received the same treatment as when they were working. Some part of Obamacare required that Caterpillar use 3rd-party contract companies to hire back retirees.

In my case, this meant I had to be hired by a 3rd party contract company. I also had to go to Bloomington for a drug urine test, even though I had never been tested for drugs in my 37 years at Caterpillar. Then they switched contract companies, so I had to do a 2nd drug urine test for the new company.

Contract employees don't have access to all the computer systems that regular employees do. Even though I had written the 2nd highest number of REDI system technical reports while I was an employee, I could not even access them when I was called back to work! I really felt like a 2nd-class citizen when I was called back to work, likely no fault of Caterpillar.

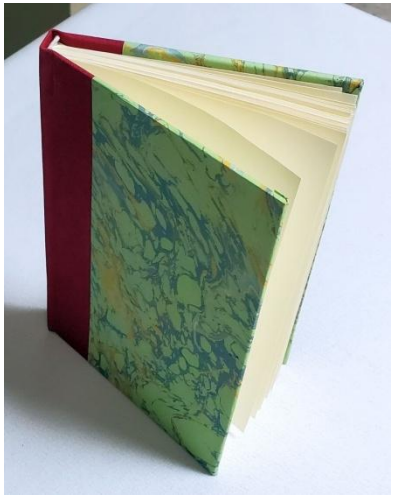
I enjoyed seeing my old friends again, but my work assignments were not very exciting. No new products were being introduced, so I was fine stopping work in 2020.

Bound my 1st Book in 2017

I have always been fascinated with physical books. I have always loved reading, and I learned to write and publish over 30 books.

In 2017, I had a PDF of a very rare book written by a Fairbury author. I could not find a paper copy of this book, so I decided to learn how to make my own hardcover book.

I bought two books on bookbinding and also studied several YouTube videos. I was able to make my own book for the first time!



Since then, I have made several other books and intend to bind some books with my grandchildren.

So in 2017, I added another hobby to my woodworking and stained-glass work.

Citizen Volunteer Award

In 2018, the Fairbury City Council presented me with a plaque for my leadership role in refurbishing Marsh Park in 2017. We also held the Marsh Park grand re-opening in 2018 with hundreds of attendees. I gave a speech at the dedication ceremony.

President of the Livingston County Historical Society

I was elected president in 2019. My term as president was normal for the first 15 months, then COVID hit in March of 2020. We had to stop meetings and house tours until the pandemic was over.

Citizen of the Year Award in 2019

The Fairbury Woman's Club awarded me their Citizen of the Year award in 2019. I was the third member of my extended family to win this award!

My mother-in-law, Marilyn Wells, won the award in 2009. My first cousin Lynn Dameron also won this award.

Three Citizen of the Year Award winners Lynn Dameron, Dale Maley, and Marilyn Wells. Maybe someday Natalie Pecharich will win the same award!

CHAPTER 15

Community Activities Continue (2021 to 2023)

Paul Garcia is a Fairbury native who got very interested in pursuing a career as a videographer. While he was still living in Fairbury, he conducted interviews and created YouTube videos featuring several interesting Fairbury residents. He then moved to Bloomington and opened his own studio there.

Paul interviewed me at my house and made the interview a YouTube video. One can watch this video on Paul's YouTube channel.

Philanthropist of the Year Outside Twin Cities

Each year, the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation selects a Philanthropist of the Year award for Bloomington-Normal residents and a separate award for citizens living outside the Bloomington-Normal area.

I was honored to receive this award in 2021. I was honored with my family at a special luncheon in Bloomington.

Jacob Maley, Connie Maley, Dale Maley, Karen Maley-Munz, Lisa Maley-Roth, Stacy Maley-Pecharich, and Marjorie Maley

Strevell House on the National Register of Historic Places

In the Fall of 2022, I decided to try to get the historic Strevell House in Pontiac added to the National Register of Historic Places.

To familiarize myself with filling out the application form, I reviewed the applications for City Hall and the Beach House in Fairbury. My relative, Jack Tollensdorf, conducted all the research and completed these applications. I also reviewed the old application for the Jones House in Pontiac.

I planned to research Strevell House and the two principal families who lived there, and write a book about the house. I figured that once I had all the historic information about the house, it would be easy to fill out the federal application to add the Strevell House.

My assumption that filling out the historical section of the application would be easy after writing the new book proved correct.

There are about five reasons why a property can be added to the National Register. I initially thought the Strevell House qualified on two of the five items. One qualification was the unique Carpenter Gothic architecture, and the second was that Jason Strevell was a very significant local figure in Pontiac.

I thought Jason Strevell was a significant historical figure for the following reasons.

1. He was a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln spent time at Strevell's home in Pontiac and then appointed him to a job at a federal customs house in New Orleans.
2. Strevell was a member of both the Illinois House and the Illinois Senate.
3. While in the Senate, Strevell helped secure approval to build the new Boys' Reformatory in Pontiac. This eventually became the Pontiac Prison, and it is still in service today.

I had to work closely with a woman from the Illinois Department of Historic Preservation, and she had to approve my application. She said the house definitely qualified because of its unique Carpenter Gothic architecture. She was not sure if it qualified because Jason Strevell was a significant local historical figure, and she said I would have to do more research on Jason Strevell.

At that point, I had already researched Jason Strevell's entire life and written a whole book about him!! There was nothing further to research.

At that point, I gave up and just had the house qualified because of its unique architecture. You only need one of the five reasons to qualify, so there was no use in further pursuing the second qualification.

The next major hurdle was deciding what type of "lingo" to use on the application. I am a Mechanical Engineer, not an Architect. Each profession has its own lingo, and an architect's lingo is quite a bit different than engineering lingo. I thought it might be easier for me to use standard engineering-type lingo instead of the rather arcane architect lingo.

I explained my dilemma to my wife regarding which lingo to use on the application. She asked a really important question, "Who will be the judges to see if the application is accepted or not?" I checked, and all 13 judges were from the architecture field. I decided to learn the architectural lingo I needed to finish the application.

My final application turned out to be 62 pages long, with 32 of the pages dedicated to photographs of the interior and exterior of the house.

The entire process from writing the new book about the house and then filling out the application took about 8 months. A State of Illinois panel of judges voted 13-0 to accept the house to the National Register.

I bought a nice sign for Strevell House, and we celebrated in the Summer of 2023 after the House was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

DAR Award of the Blue Ribbon for Excellence in Historic Presentation

In the last few years, I have given several historic presentations to various DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) groups. In 2023, they gave me an award for my past work in preserving local history.

New Awning for Fairbury Echoes Museum in 2023

Our Fairbury Echoes Museum is housed in an old building on Main Street [Locust Street] in Fairbury. Maybe 20 years ago, an awning with a lightweight aluminum frame and sheet metal roofing was installed. Over the years, this awning had deteriorated to the point that parts of the sheeting were falling off.

Our museum operates as a non-profit organization, and funds are scarce. I estimated it would cost about $20,000 to hire a local contractor to build a new awning. I decided it would be a fun project to design and build it myself.

I decided to design and build a much more substantial awning similar to the one used on two adjacent buildings. I needed to build about 20 trusses for this project. I decided to space the wood trusses 16" apart and use ½" thick pressure-treated plywood for the roof sheeting.

Trouble Drilling through the Old Brick Building Wall

I wanted to install a new horizontal board for the inside of the trusses to rest on. I also wanted to bolt this new board to the old existing brick wall. I needed to drill a ½" hole through the 18" wall.

When I tried to drill these holes, in some spots, I kept hitting steel pieces inside the brick wall. I finally concluded that the original builders threw some scrap steel into the hollow space in the wall. The solution was to move the hole locations just enough to clear the steel in the wall.

Building My Own Trusses

The last time I had built any trusses was circa 1965 when I helped my dad make trusses for our new chicken house. I made a jig or pattern in my garage and then built 20 trusses.

These trusses were fairly heavy, and I probably would have struggled trying to lift them into place safely by myself. I recruited my high school classmate, Randy Doran, to help me lift them into place. Randy and I quickly and safely installed all 20 trusses, about 10 feet off the ground.

Compliment on My Frame Design

Whenever I work on Main Street, I always attract quite a few "sidewalk supervisors" who stop by to talk or give me a hard time about something. One day, when I had the main framing for the new museum awning built, a stranger walked up and studied my design and installation in great detail.

I asked him if I could help him. He said he was a union carpenter and highly complimented my framing design. He also liked how I used a 1-inch-high steel spacer to provide an air gap between the concrete sidewalk and the main 6x6-inch wood support posts. He knew that wood rot always occurs where wood meets concrete because concrete always contains moisture. I had learned this in 2017 when I was working in Marsh Park. I thanked him for his compliments.

You Have Huge Dip in the Main Horizontal Beam Support

I was pretty proud of being able to plan and safely install many heavy 6x6-inch vertical posts and the main 2x12-inch horizontal support beams by myself.

As I was finishing these up, another sidewalk supervisor said I had a major flaw in this framework: a large dip in the center of the main horizontal beam that would support the 20 trusses.

Since it was the end of the day, I told him that tomorrow morning I would run a string the full 26-foot length of the beam and we would see if I had a big dip.

The next morning, I laid a string across the 26-foot width. I found I was only ¼" off at the center. I told the sidewalk supervisor my results and said that if I built it again, I would probably not get it that close!!

Turns out he was looking at the main beam from inside the building, which had settled over the years and also had some old wavy glass that distorted the view!

FAIRBURY
FURNITURE

Dale and Marjorie Maley at a wedding in 2012

CHAPTER 16

Recent Years (2024 to 2026)

The year 2024 marked the 100th Anniversary of our Livingston County Historical Society. Our board of directors came up with two ideas to celebrate this special Anniversary.

1. Sponsor a float in the Pontiac Thresherman's Parade. This is the biggest parade of the year in Livingston County.
2. Hire Paul Garcia to make a commemorative video about the Historical Society and our three historic houses.
3.

The float idea worked out fine, and about 20 members of the Historical Society rode on a "people mover" type trailer in the parade.

The Paul Garcia video idea also worked well (suggested by me). Since I have so much historical information and images, I was able to share them with Paul for the video.

Paul then interviewed about six key members of the Historical Society in the Strevell House. All of them did a great job on the video.

Then it was my turn to be a "movie star" for a day. Paul had me take him to quite a few places to film in one day.

1. Chief Memorial stone memorial on the southeast corner of the Historic Old Courthouse.
2. The old Livingston County Courthouse
3. Our archive collection is in the basement of Pontiac City Hall
4. The Jones House.
5. The Strevell House.
6. The Yost House

When I got back home in Fairbury, I told my wife I was glad I chose to be an engineer instead of a movie star. I had to repeat all of my lines about three times to get them right. I was mentally and physically exhausted even though I did no physical work that day.

The final YouTube video is extremely popular with the Historical Society members and the general public. Over 20,000 people have watched this video. It is now a permanent record of the people and places involved with the Historical Society in the year 2024.

Death of Mother-in-Law Marilyn Wells in 2025

Connie's mother lived to be 101. Our entire family really enjoyed being around Marilyn because she always had a positive attitude about life.

Biggest History Book Writing Project in 2026

The Fairbury Fair is celebrating its 150th Anniversary since its founding in 1876. The Fairbury Fair Board asked me to write a new book covering this 150-year history.

Since I have already written about 30 local history books, the mechanics of writing book #31 were not really a problem.

Fortunately, we have both paper and digital copies of our Fairbury Blade newspaper dating back to 1877. When these newspapers were scanned into microfilm many years ago, the quality of almost every image was very poor. The microfilm became the source for the online digital archive of this newspaper.

So I spent many hours manually going through about 150 thick, paper-bound newspapers, photographing key illustrations and photos.

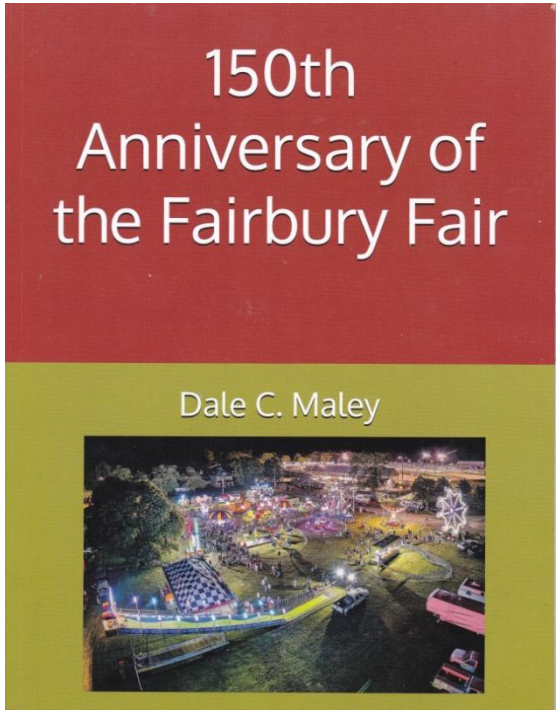
Even though these old newspapers are bound by year, the ink on the oldest newspapers has begun to fade. In many cases, the photograph of the old newspaper was not of good enough quality to be included in the new book.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) to the Rescue

I have been using both Perplexity and ChatGPT AI systems for about a year. I found that ChatGPT does an outstanding job of saving faded newspaper illustrations or photos. Thanks to AI, I was able to save and use many very neat old illustrations and photographs in this book.

Final Book Statistics

The completed book has about 315 pages with many illustrations and images. It took me about 5 months to write the book, on a part-time basis. I intentionally did not keep track of the labor hours I spent on this project. I am pretty sure I spent more hours on this book than any of the 30 past books I have written.



The Fairbury Fair Board and early customers who bought the book have been very happy with the book's quality.

My Technical Reports Still in Use at Caterpillar

A few months ago, I had lunch with some current Caterpillar employees. One of the engineering supervisors told me that the week before, he was looking for a product test procedure. He could not find it until he thought, "I bet Dale put a copy in the REDI Technical Report system." He checked the system and found my report.

A pair of younger engineers said they still use my old technical reports almost weekly.

I was very happy to hear that my technical reports are still relevant and being used, even though I have now been retired for 10 years!!

CHAPTER 17

Looking Back

What Shaped Me?

When I look back over my life, several people and experiences stand out as having the greatest influence on who I became.

The most important influence was my upbringing by my parents and grandparents. They taught me the values of hard work, honesty, responsibility, and helping others. My Uncle Dale Dameron and cousin Lynn Dameron also had a major impact on my life. They taught me practical skills and showed me the importance of lifelong learning and curiosity.

My farm background definitely shaped my life. From an early age, I learned responsibility by caring for livestock and doing daily chores. The animals had to be fed and watered every day, whether I felt like doing it or not. Farm life also taught me self-reliance. My father was a good example of this trait. Farmers quickly learn that when something breaks, there is often nobody available to fix it except themselves. You learn to figure things out and solve problems.

The Fairbury-Cropsey school system also did an excellent job of preparing me for college and for future life experiences. Looking back, I did not fully appreciate at the time how fortunate I was to have dedicated teachers who challenged students to do their best. The education I received in Fairbury gave me a strong foundation for the rest of my life.

They say that behind every great man is an even greater woman! That statement is especially true in my case. My wife, Connie, has been my partner, supporter, and best friend for nearly 50 years. I knew way back in 1973 that if she went on a date with me in my Christmas-tree-colored Mustang, she was probably a keeper! Throughout our marriage, she has always supported my many interests, projects, and career moves, even when those moves required relocating our family across the country.

My education at the University of Illinois in Agricultural Engineering also played a major role in shaping my life. The engineering program taught me how to analyze problems, gather facts, evaluate alternatives, and develop practical solutions. Those skills became the foundation for my entire engineering career and proved valuable in many other areas of life as well.

The MBA program at Illinois State University also dramatically changed my life. I learned how to build wealth through low-cost index fund investing and long-term financial planning. Equally important, I learned to research complex topics, analyze large amounts of information, and present the results in a way ordinary people could understand. Those skills later proved valuable when writing books, giving presentations, researching local history, and helping others with financial planning.

Career accomplishments

Although I worked for Ford Tractor for less than two years, their new engineer training program had a lasting impact on my career. Ford taught me the importance of understanding manufacturing processes, documenting technical information, and approaching problems systematically. The lessons I learned there served me well throughout the remainder of my engineering career.

During my 37 years at Caterpillar, I held many different positions in three different states. I worked as a Plant Engineer, Manufacturing Engineer, Operations Superintendent, and Assembly and Test Systems Supervisor. The variety of assignments allowed me to gain experience in product development, manufacturing, testing, project management, and leadership.

One of my most significant accomplishments was helping start three Caterpillar facilities located in Illinois, South Carolina, and Georgia. Plant start-ups are challenging because everything must come together at once—facilities, equipment, processes, products, suppliers, and people. These projects required teamwork, planning, problem-solving, and countless hours of effort, but they were among the most rewarding experiences of my career.

The emissions era from approximately 2004 through 2010 was one of the most challenging technical periods in Caterpillar's history. New government regulations required major changes to diesel engines and fuel systems. I was fortunate to play key roles in developing new products, manufacturing processes, and testing systems that helped Caterpillar remain a leader in the diesel engine industry during this period of rapid change.

I also contributed to Caterpillar's intellectual property portfolio by being awarded sixteen U.S. patents. However, I am equally proud of my efforts to document technical knowledge for future generations of engineers. During my career, I wrote 762 technical reports, the second-highest total in Caterpillar history. My goal was always to record important lessons learned, technical data, and procedures so that future engineers would not have to solve the same problems all over again.

Perhaps the greatest compliment I received from Caterpillar was being called back to work three separate times after retirement. To me, this was an indication that my experience, knowledge, and contributions continued to provide value to the company even after my formal career had ended.

Family

I have been blessed with a wonderful wife, and together we have shared nearly fifty years of marriage. Throughout our journey together, Connie has been my partner, supporter, sounding board, and best friend. We have experienced many adventures together, including raising a family, relocating several times for my career, and enjoying our retirement years.

We were also blessed with two wonderful children, Stacy and Jacob. It has been rewarding to watch them grow into successful adults, build their own careers, and become outstanding parents. Connie and I now enjoy spending time with our eight grandchildren and watching them grow and develop their own interests and talents.

Both Connie and I were fortunate to be raised in families that emphasized the importance of family relationships, hard work, and helping others. Our parents and grandparents set an example that influenced us throughout our lives. We have tried to pass those same values on to our children and grandchildren.

I have also been fortunate to have supportive siblings. My brother Brad and my sisters, Karen and Lisa, have assisted me with many community volunteer projects over the years. One example was the 2017 Marsh Park renovation project, where all three volunteered their time and effort to help save and restore one of Fairbury's most historic parks. Their willingness to help reflects the same spirit of family and community service that has been important throughout our lives.

Community service

Since retiring from Caterpillar, I have devoted significant time to community service and historic preservation. Retirement allowed me to apply many of the planning, organizational, and problem-solving skills I developed during my engineering career to projects that benefited my local community.

One of my first major retirement projects was helping lead the Fairbury Improvement Group. Our volunteers completed a wide variety of projects that improved the quality of life for both residents and visitors. Every day, people continue to enjoy the refurbished Marsh Park, the historical murals in Veterans Memorial Park, the

restored historic advertising signs in downtown Fairbury, and the improvements made to North Park. It is rewarding to know that these projects will benefit the community for many years to come.

It has also been a great honor to serve first as Vice-President and later as President of the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Preserving local history is important because once historical information is lost, it is rarely recoverable. Through exhibits, publications, and our museum website, we continue to make Fairbury's history available to current residents and future generations. Seeing people use the museum's resources to learn about their families, homes, schools, and community has been especially rewarding.

Serving as President of the Livingston County Historical Society has been another meaningful experience. During my years in that role, I have helped maintain and promote the Society's three historic properties in Pontiac. These buildings provide visitors with a connection to the county's past and help preserve an important part of our local heritage.

One of my most satisfying preservation projects was helping place the historic Strevell House on the National Register of Historic Places. The process required extensive historical research, writing, photography, and documentation. In some ways, I was following in the footsteps of my cousin, Jack Tollensdorf, who successfully placed Fairbury's City Hall and the Beach House on the National Register years earlier. I was proud to continue that tradition of preserving historically significant buildings for future generations.

Looking back, I have found that community service and historic preservation have provided many of the same rewards that I enjoyed during my engineering career. Both involve solving problems, working with people, and creating something of lasting value that will continue to benefit others long after the work is completed.

Preserving Knowledge

When I look back over my life, one common theme seems to run through many of my activities. I have always been interested in preserving knowledge so future generations can benefit from it.

As an engineer at Caterpillar, I believed it was important to document lessons learned, test results, design decisions, and procedures. During my career, I wrote 762 technical reports, the second-highest total in Caterpillar history. My goal was to make sure future engineers could easily find information and would not have to solve the same problems over and over again. Even ten years after my retirement, many of those reports are still being used by Caterpillar engineers.

The same desire to preserve information eventually led me into genealogy and local history. After my mother moved from the family farm into town, I inherited much of our family's historical material. I researched our ancestors and created family history books so future generations of our family would know where they came from and who came before them.

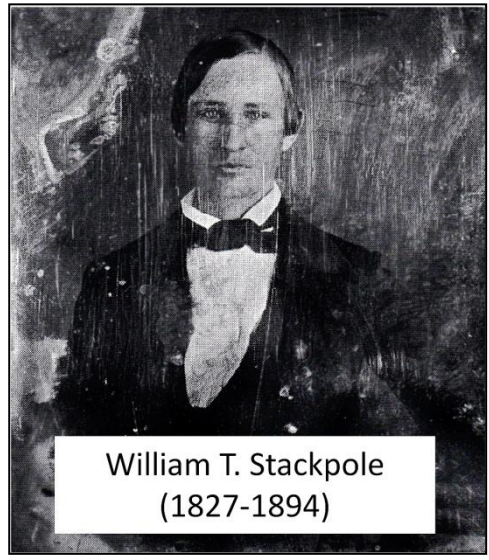
My interest in preserving knowledge then expanded into local history. I have written over 30 local history books and nearly 400 Fairbury history articles. I have also created hundreds of PowerPoint presentations and almost three hundred YouTube videos. Whenever possible, I have uploaded my work to Archive.org so it will remain available long after I am gone.

I have learned that history can disappear quickly if no one takes the time to record it. Old photographs get thrown away. Family stories are forgotten. Businesses close and their records disappear. Longtime residents pass away, taking their memories with them. Once that information is lost, it is often gone forever.

I hope that future engineers, historians, genealogists, and family members will find some value in the information I have preserved. If my work helps someone solve a problem, learn about their family, understand local history, or avoid repeating a past mistake, then the time spent creating it was worthwhile.

Looking back, I realize that whether I was writing engineering reports, researching family history, creating museum exhibits, writing books, or producing YouTube videos, I was really doing the same thing. I was trying to preserve knowledge and pass it along to the next generation.

Dale C. Maley versus William T. Stackpole (1827-1894)



When I first started researching early Fairbury history, I became fascinated by one of the town's pioneer settlers, William T. Stackpole. The more I learned about him, the more interesting he became. I eventually wrote two books about his life.

Stackpole lived a remarkable life. During his lifetime, he was a gold prospector, pioneer settler, farmer, merchant, grain speculator, oil field worker, real estate salesman, inventor, writer, publisher, and visionary. He made and lost three fortunes and was constantly seeking new opportunities and challenges. Few people in Livingston County history lived a more varied life than William T. Stackpole.

As I researched his life, it occurred to me that there were some similarities between Mr. Stackpole and me. Although our lives were separated by more than a century, neither of us seemed content to focus on just one interest. We were both curious people who enjoyed learning new things and taking on new challenges.

If a future historian were asked to summarize my life, they might describe me as an engineer, inventor, manager, problem solver,

author, investor, financial writer, publisher, historian, genealogist, videographer, community volunteer, museum organizer, woodworker, stained glass artist, and educator. Over the years, I have pursued many different interests, some as a profession and others simply because I enjoyed learning something new.

Perhaps that is why I found William T. Stackpole's story so interesting. In many ways, he demonstrated that a single occupation or interest need not define a person. Looking back over my own life, I realize that I have also enjoyed many different careers, hobbies, and volunteer activities. Like Stackpole, I have been fortunate to live many different lives within a single lifetime.

Closing Thought

When I first began researching our family genealogy, I discovered biographies of my great-great-grandfather, John Bodley, in the 1878 Livingston County history book. I was fascinated to read about his life, even though he had passed away many years before I was born.

That experience taught me that ordinary people can become interesting to future generations simply because they lived through a different time and took the time to record their experiences.

I hope that many years from now, one of my descendants will discover this autobiography and enjoy reading about my life. Perhaps they will learn a little about our family, the times I lived in, and the lessons I learned along the way.

If this book helps future generations understand where they came from and encourages them to preserve their own stories, then writing it will have been well worth the effort.

Recommended Reading

Stuffed Clubs and Antimacassars by Alma Lewis James.

Author Spotlight

Dale C. Maley

Dale C. Maley is President of the Livingston County Historical Society and the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Dale is an expert on Fairbury, Illinois history and has written over 380 newspaper articles and more than 30 books about Fairbury history. Both Dale and his wife are 5th generation citizens of Fairbury.

Also by Dale C. Maley

Fairbury and Livingston County History Books

1. Abraham Lincoln and the Strevell Family of Pontiac, Illinois
2. Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois
3. Fairbury Fair 150th Anniversary
4. Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition
5. Fairbury History Stories Volume 1
6. Fairbury History Stories Volume 2
7. Fairbury History Stories Volume 3
8. Fairbury History Stories Volume 4
9. Fairbury History Stories Volume 5
10. Fairbury, Illinois Book Authors
11. Fairbury, Illinois from Prehistoric to Modern Times
12. Fairbury, Illinois in 1888
13. Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War
14. Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars
15. Franklin Oliver: Pioneer Settler of Livingston County, Illinois
16. History of Murders Committed in Fairbury, Illinois
17. History of the Livingston County Illinois Home & Community Education Organization
18. Honegger's & Co. of Fairbury, Illinois
19. Livingston County Historical Society: It's Beginning and Some Later Years with Updates
20. Ornamental Iron Artist Thomas F. Googerty from Pontiac, Illinois
21. The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887
22. The Founding of Fairbury, Illinois
23. The Goudy Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
24. The Kring Family of Fairbury, Illinois
25. The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois
26. The Massacre of the Nelson Buck Party from Pontiac, Illinois
27. The Story of the Jones House in Pontiac, Illinois
28. The Zoath Yost Family of Pontiac, Illinois
29. Walton Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
30. William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois

31. William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields

Investment Topic Books by Dale C. Maley

1. Are 529 Plans Really the Best Way to Save for College?
2. Are Black Swans Really Harmful to Ordinary Investors?
3. Are You Using the Right Rules to Plan Your Retirement?
4. Do I Need Long-Term Care Insurance?
5. Do I Need Long-Term Disability Insurance?
6. Do I Need Ten, Twenty, or Thirty Times My Income to Retire?
7. Do I Need Umbrella Insurance?
8. Frequently Asked Questions About ETFs and Index Funds
9. How Asset Allocation Can Help You Achieve Your Financial Goals
10. How Do I Design My Own Financial Plan?
11. How Do I Estimate Retirement Living Expenses?
12. How Do I Maximize Retirement Income From My Portfolio?
13. How Do I Select the Correct Risk Level for My Portfolio?
14. How Do You Know When We Are in a Financial Bubble?
15. How Much Income Do I Really Need in Retirement?
16. How to Build a Risk-Free Retirement Portfolio
17. How to Cut the Cost of Your Auto and Homeowner's Insurance
18. How to Find a Good Financial Planner
19. How to Invest for Retirement After the Crash of 2008
20. How to Read Your Way to Financial Wealth
21. How to Save and Invest for Retirement
22. How to Use Psychology to Achieve Your Financial Goals
23. How Would a Low-Cost Index Fund Approach Have Worked During the Great Depression?
24. Index Mutual Funds: How to Simplify Your Financial Life and Beat the Pros
25. Is Saving 10% of My Gross Income Good Enough?
26. My Journey to a Diversified Portfolio of Low-Cost Index Funds
27. Rules of Thumb or Retirement Planning Software?
28. Sell My Stocks Before the Baby Boomers Crash the Market?

29. Should Immediate Annuities Be a Tool in Your Retirement Planning Toolbox?
30. Total Market or Slice-n-Dice for My Investment Portfolio?
31. What Are the Requirements for Becoming a Financial Planner?
32. What Is the Optimum Method for Converting a Retirement Portfolio Into Income?
33. What Lessons Can We Learn from the Crash of 2008?
34. Who Are the Bogleheads and Should You Become One?
35. Who Wins the Variable Annuity Versus Mutual Fund Battle?
36. Why We Don't Save Enough for Retirement and How You Can Save More

U.S. Patents Issued to Dale C. Maley

During my 37-year engineering career at Caterpillar, I was awarded 16 U.S. patents related primarily to electronically controlled diesel fuel injection systems.

1. Electrically Controlled Fluid Control Valve of a Fuel Injector System — U.S. Patent 5,474,234, issued December 12, 1995

2. Electro-Hydraulic Spool Control Valve Assembly Adapted for a Fuel Injector — U.S. Patent 5,479,901, issued January 2, 1996

3. Fluid Damping of a Valve Assembly — U.S. Patent 5,651,501, issued July 29, 1997

4. Fuel Injection Control Valve — U.S. Patent 5,407,131, issued April 18, 1995

5. Fuel Injection Control Valve with Dual Solenoids — U.S. Patent 5,494,219, issued February 27, 1996

6. Fuel Injector with Spring-Biased Control Valve — U.S. Patent 5,605,289, issued February 25, 1997

7. Hard Magnetic Valve Actuator Adapted for a Fuel Injector — U.S. Patent 5,488,340, issued January 30, 1996

8. High Pressure Fuel System Valve — U.S. Patent 5,392,811, issued February 28, 1995

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10. Hydraulically-Actuated Fluid Injector Having Pre-Injection Pressurizable Fluid Storage Chamber and Direct-Operated Check — U.S. Patent 5,673,669, issued October 7, 1997

11. Hydraulically-Actuated Fuel Injector with Direct Control Needle Valve — U.S. Patent 5,697,342, issued December 16, 1997

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13. Magnetically Adjustable Valve Adapted for a Fuel Injector — U.S. Patent 5,758,626, issued June 2, 1998

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15. Partially Plastic Fuel Injector Component and Method of Making the Same — U.S. Patent 6,631,857, issued October 14, 2003

16. Valve-Testing System and Method Employing a Fluid-Transfer System with a Reservoir — U.S. Patent 7,357,020, issued April 15, 2008